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WITHDRAWN

BENJAMIN DISRAELI

Who breaks his birth's invidious bar,
  And grasps the skirts of happy chance,
  And breasts the blows of circumstance,
And grapples with his evil star;

Who makes by force his merit known,
  And lives to clutch the golden keys,
  To mould a mighty state's decrees,
And shape the whisper of the throne;

And moving up from high to higher,
  Becomes on Fortune's crowning slope
  The pillar of a people's hope,
The centre of a world's desire.

TENNYSON, 1835.

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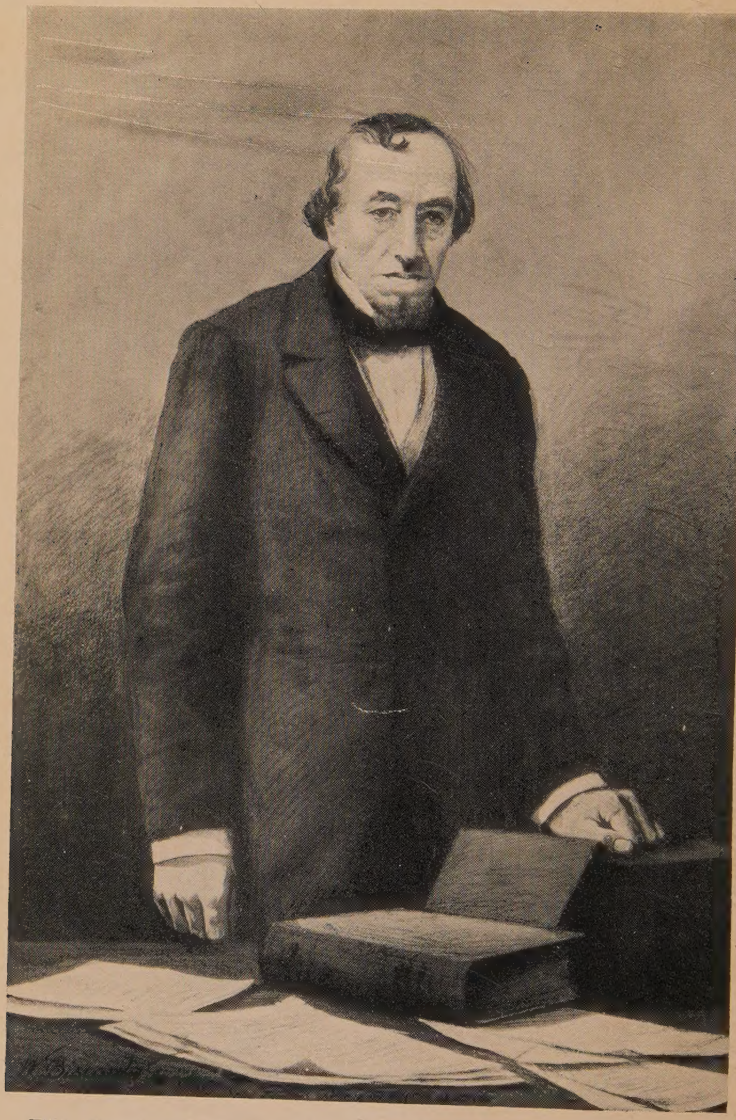

THE EARL OF BEACONSFIELD IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS.

Drawn from life in 1878 by Biscombe Gardner.

In the possession of Sir Edward Clarke.

Frontispiece.

BENJAMIN DISRAELI

THE ROMANCE OF A GREAT CAREER

1804–1881

By the RT. HON. SIR EDWARD CLARKE, K.C.

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To

MY FRIEND

CONINGSBY DISRAELI

WHO WORTHILY BEARS AN HONOURED NAME

I DEDICATE THIS TRIBUTE

TO THE MEMORY OF HIS

ILLUSTRIOUS UNCLE.

EDWARD CLARKE.

February 15, 1926.

PREFACE

When Mr. Monypenny died after completing two volumes of the authorised biography of Benjamin Disraeli, I, with others, applied to be allowed to complete the work. The executors wisely confided the task to one who had a wider knowledge of political affairs, and an admirable literary style. The result is that we now have the fullest and most interesting biography of any British statesman. But it is of necessity so voluminous and so costly that the majority of readers are unable to afford the money for its purchase or the time for its perusal. About two years ago I determined to make the preparation of a much shorter biography the habitual and pleasant occupation of my abundant leisure. I did not at first contemplate publication. I was very doubtful if I should ever be able to complete the work. And I knew that it could not be published without the permission of the owners of the copyright of the larger biography from which so large a proportion of its contents must be drawn. These owners were the executors of Lord Beaconsfield and the proprietors of *The Times*. When about a third of the book was written I applied for this permission, and through the good offices of Mr. Buckle, Mr. John Murray, and Mr. Lints Smith it was very kindly granted. I have made full use of this privilege, and am sincerely grateful to those who accorded it and those who helped me to obtain it. My aim has been to give in moderate compass a clear, straightforward, trustworthy, and sufficiently full record of the incidents of a singularly interesting career.

The reader will not find any critical discussion of the subjects or literary merits of Disraeli's books, or any argument in vindication of his political policy and action.

I trust that the readers of this book, if they have not already enjoyed the perusal of his novels, will now be wise enough to repair that omission; and as far as limits of space would permit, I have quoted his own words in explanation and justification of his principles and his conduct, giving the narrative as far as possible the character of an autobiography.

Every boy will be the better for having before him this great example of industry, courage, and patience.

Every Conservative will find his political faith refreshed and strengthened by having at hand the golden sayings of the greatest of Conservative leaders.

And every student of history must be interested in the brilliant and romantic career of the greatest Englishman who was born and died in the nineteenth century.

In preparing the book for publication I have had valuable help from Mr. Buckle, Mr. John Murray, and Mr. J. S. Sandars; Major Coningsby Disraeli has provided an unpublished view of Hughenden; and Sir William Hart Dyke has lent for reproduction a short but charming specimen of Disraeli's handwriting. To all these kind friends I give my hearty thanks.

EDWARD CLARKE.

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Drawn from life in 1878 by Biscombe Gardner. In the possession of Sir Edward Clarke.

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BOOK I

YOUTH, 1804–1823

I. CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH
II. PAMPHLETS AND NEWSPAPER

BENJAMIN DISRAELI

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

In December, 1804, Isaac D'Israeli, a young literary man, with the much younger wife whom he had married about three years before, and a little daughter not yet quite two years old, was living in a roomy and substantial house in King's Road, Bedford Row, overlooking the pleasant garden of Gray's Inn. The house is now No. 22, Theobald's Road. He had chosen this neighbourhood because, having ample means inherited from his maternal grandmother, he had resisted his father's efforts to lead him into commerce on the Stock Exchange, and after some Continental travel and some poor attempts at poetry, had resolved that the study of history and literature should be the occupation of his life.

Twelve years before this date he had published a volume of fragmentary articles on all sorts of subjects, and had called it *Curiosities of Literature*. Nothing of the kind had been seen before. The book became suddenly and widely popular, and its author soon made the acquaintance of many of the best-known writers of the day. Resolved to follow up his success, he became one of the most constant of readers at the British Museum, and there, and in his own house, which was soon filled with books, he spent days and nights of industry, storing up the references and quotations he needed for his work.

Here, ' born in a library,' Benjamin Disraeli drew his first breath on December 21, 1804, and eight days later was named according to the Jewish ritual.

His mother is said to have been an excellent woman, but she took no part in the education of her children, and does not appear to have had any influence upon the conduct or character of her eldest son. The father was absorbed in his literary labours. So very early indeed, before the child could either read or write, he was sent to a dame's school at Islington, and a few years later passed to a school at Blackheath kept by an Independent minister. Here he soon tasted the difficulties which were to beset his path in life. There was another little Jew boy at the school; when the rest of the scholars knelt at the daily prayers, these two were made to stand back against the school-room wall; and once a week a Rabbi came to teach them Hebrew. Their life cannot have been very happy. They were of a separate and inferior race; and in young D'Israeli's case the name betrayed the taint of a foreign origin. Child as he was, there came to him the bitter feeling that he was 'without a country, without kindred, and without friends.'

His childhood, indeed, whether at school or at home, would have been very loveless and lonely but for the strong affection which from their earliest years grew up and deepened with every year between him and his sister Sarah. Two years his senior, of a sweet disposition and keen intelligence, watching the development of his mind and his early efforts at literary expression with stimulating sympathy and encouraging admiration, she became, and continued to be throughout her life, his closest companion and most loving counsellor. Until he was nearly thirty years of age no other woman found access to his heart. And to the end of his life it was always with affectionate emotion that he spoke of his 'Dear, dear Sa.'

When the boy was thirteen a great change took place. Isaac D'Israeli was nominally a member of the Sephardim congregation at Bevis Marks, although he never attended the Synagogue. He declared that the services, as then conducted, disturbed, instead of

exciting, religious emotions, and that some part of the ritual he could only tolerate because he was willing to concede all he could in matters which he held to be indifferent. When the Elders, notwithstanding his laxity of observance, appointed him Warden of the Congregation, and fined him £40 for declining to perform the duties of the office, he refused to pay the fine, and practically ceased to be a member of the Congregation. He was, in truth, a Voltairean free-thinker: no religious observances were known in his house; no religious influences were brought to bear upon his children. His father was still a member of the Congregation, so far at least as subscription to their funds was concerned; and while he lived Isaac D'Israeli refrained from definitely separating himself from the Jewish faith. But upon his father's death in 1817 he promptly did so, and had all his children baptised at St. Andrew's, Holborn. It would have been cruel to send Benjamin back to the unsympathetic and derisive companionship of his old school-fellows; so he was removed to a school at Walthamstow kept by a Unitarian minister named Cogan, a fine classical scholar whose acquaintance Isaac D'Israeli had made some years earlier at a bookseller's shop, where Cogan purchased always the finest editions in the finest condition. At this school Benjamin remained two years. Nothing was thought of there but the two dead languages, but Mr. Cogan was an admirable instructor in them, as well as a first-rate scholar, and he found in young D'Israeli an eager and diligent pupil. The boy did not reach the first class, which was very small in number, and dealt with Æschylus, Aristophanes, Aristotle, Plato, and the Greek orators; but in the second class he read Herodotus, much of Thucydides, much of Homer, and plays of Sophocles and Euripides. In Latin he was much stronger than in Greek, and his reading was wide and various. Here his mind was first directed to the study of oratory; and many years afterwards, when setting

down some grateful recollections of the Walthamstow school and its master, he wrote: 'In Latin he bathed us in Cicero, and always impressed on us that so far as style was concerned, in lucid arrangement of subject and power of expression, the *Pro Milone* was an education itself.' At fifteen years of age Benjamin D'Israeli quitted school, and his formal education ceased. There was one omission from it which must be noted. He never received any definite instruction either in the Jewish or the Christian faith. The slight and inharmonious influences of the Rabbi, and the Independent, and the Unitarian seem never to have affected him at all. Like all intelligent men, he was interested in the principles and history of all the great religions of the world, but he never made any definite statement of his own beliefs. In early life he wrote of the Nile, 'the mighty river which had witnessed the invention of so many creeds,' and declared that 'we believe what our fathers credited, because they were convinced without a cause.' And in a later year he said, in a quotation, or a coincidence, what old Lord Shaftesbury had said before him: 'Sensible men are all of the same religion. What is it? Sensible men never tell.'

Mr. Cogan's enthusiasm for the study of the classical authors had been so fully imbibed by his pupil that the next two years were spent by him in carrying forward the course of reading which had begun at Walthamstow. His quiet home had very few visitors; there he could command silence, solitude unbroken and undisturbed. He gave many hours of the day and evening to solitary reading, and with the occasional help of a tutor repaired the deficiencies in his knowledge of Greek. Demosthenes gradually displaced in his esteem the supremacy he had given to Cicero. He had laid the first foundations of accurate classical knowledge under the tuition of the learned Mr. Cogan; and twelve hours a day, and self-banishment from society, overcame in twelve months the

ill-effects of his imperfect education. The result of this extraordinary exertion may be conceived. At the end of twelve months he, like many other young enthusiasts, had discovered that all the wit and wisdom of the world were concentrated in some fifty antique volumes, and he treated the unlucky moderns with the most sublime spirit of hauteur imaginable. The second of these two years of study was not so exclusively devoted to these classical authors. He turned to the study of English history, and especially to that period, the first half of the seventeenth century, upon a history of which his father was then engaged.

Then, too, began the habit which continued throughout his life, and gave to his writings and speeches their most brilliant characteristics. Demosthenes and Cicero inspired him to emulation. He, too, would be an orator. In the solitude of his room he poured forth speeches and grew 'intoxicated with his own eloquence.' He began to ponder over the music of language; he 'studied the collocation of sweet words, and constructed elaborate sentences in solitary walks.'

These studies and habits had their natural result. The boy's ambition was stirred; he longed for a life of activity and power; and he saw that the faculties he had so sedulously cultivated could only find the fit arena for their exercise in political controversy and Parliamentary debate. He desired to spend his next few years in preparation for a political career. Unfortunately his father had formed a very different plan. Isaac D'Israeli had as one of his closest friends a senior partner in a well-established and prosperous firm of solicitors in the city of London, Swain and Son, and they arranged that Benjamin should become his articled clerk. They hoped that, when the term of articled clerkship expired, he would marry his employer's only daughter, though of this prospective part of the agreement nothing was said to excite the apprehension of the intended bridegroom. Benjamin

vainly remonstrated. His father hotly insisted, and the son reluctantly submitted, and in November, 1821, began his attendance at the offices in Frederick's Place, Old Jewry.

Disraeli said in after years that his time at these offices was by no means wasted; that he was treated more as a private secretary than a clerk; that he became acquainted with important city men; and that his work gave him great facility with his pen, and no inconsiderable knowledge of human nature. To a mind so keen and receptive as his no experience of affairs of any kind could be unprofitable; but this episode in his life was a real misfortune. His evenings were spent at home alone, and always in deep study; and now his time and thought were chiefly given to the literature and history of his own country. The distaste for the lawyer's office became more and more disturbing. He grew pensive and restless. His father, noting his depression, and perhaps beginning to doubt the wisdom of the scheme of life on which he had insisted, tried to relieve the dulness of the office work by introducing him to some of his many literary friends, and obtained for him one invitation at least to a dinner at Albemarle Street, where John Murray was wont to entertain a brilliant group of the most noted authors of the day. But these glimpses of a livelier world were not likely to reconcile the youth to the monotony of Frederick's Place. He endured it for two years and a half, and then his health, hitherto continuously good, gave signs of breaking. Isaac D'Israeli was himself out of health, and father and son went off together to Bruges, and Antwerp, and the Rhine. Descending the ' magical waters,' Disraeli resolved that he would not be a lawyer. There was a sharp conflict between father and son, but this time the father yielded, and by consent the articles of service were cancelled.

But the mischief of this ill-advised employment lasted many years. Disraeli had joined a fellow-clerk

named Evans in some speculations on the Stock Exchange. These were probably at first successful, and the association continued after he left Frederick's Place. The son of a wealthy stockbroker joined them, and in November, 1824, the three partners began some speculations in South American shares. The speculations failed, and by the following July they had lost so heavily that Disraeli found himself in debt to the amount of several thousand pounds. His father did not help him—perhaps he was not allowed to know of his son's folly; and it was not until thirty years later that the debt was finally discharged. It was the beginning of financial difficulties which continued during the whole course of his life. They never seem to have troubled him at all. He said, indeed, in one of his books, ' Nothing is so harassing as a want of money,' and at another time, ' Debt is the prolific mother of folly and of crime; it taints the course of life in all its dreams.' But he wrote quite cheerfully to his friends, even when he could not dine with them for fear of being arrested for debt if he showed himself in the streets, or in later years could not venture to come up from Bradenham to London; and when his debts were most pressing he was always scheming the purchase of a country estate.

CHAPTER II

PAMPHLETS AND NEWSPAPER

The year 1825 brought sudden and notable changes in Benjamin Disraeli's life. The previous five years had passed in dull monotony—the regular hours of a solicitor's office and the quiet evenings of classical studies at home. His life had not been lightened by amusements. He had no taste for music; the theatre never attracted him; his brothers were too young to be his companions; and he had no very intimate friend. The social inferiority of his race, which was then universally assumed, but which he in later years by his actions and his example absolutely destroyed, barred him from friendships which his father's reputation and his own character would otherwise have attracted. But when early in 1825 he turned his back upon the Old Jewry, he passed at once into a life of swift activity, and before that year closed he had shown his power of capturing the confidence of the most astute and experienced men, and had written as brilliant a work of fiction as ever came from the pen of a lad of twenty years of age.

While he was in Swain and Son's office he had become acquainted with Mr. Joseph Distin Powles, the head of a powerful financial house in the city of London, who had successfully promoted several mining companies, and was now deeply engaged in the affairs of an Anglo-Mexican Mining Association, to which Swain and Son were solicitors. At this time Disraeli was in the midst of the speculations which afterwards turned out so disastrously, and it occurred to him or to Powles that public confidence in these Mexican enterprises might be secured and sustained by the

publication through Murray of pamphlets dealing with the whole subject of Mexican finance. What arrangements were made between Powles and Disraeli is not known. It would be strange if any partnership existed between the financier who had large resources and the young solicitor's clerk who had none, but the fact is that a year later Disraeli, receiving some money from Colburn for one of his books, sent Murray £150 in payment for printing and publishing the pamphlets. The first of these appeared in March, 1825. This pamphlet of one hundred pages was something much more important than a mere stock-jobbing advertisement. The future of the South American republics, which had broken away from the sovereignty of Spain, had special interest for Great Britain. In their struggle for independence they had received sympathy and support from the British Ministry, and the famous declaration of Canning, ' I called the New World into existence to redress the balance of the Old,' was only a splendid exaggeration of the service he had rendered to the infant states. It touched the Imperial instincts which from boyhood to old age were the dominant characteristics of Disraeli's foreign policy, and he poured forth in this pamphlet in sonorous sentences his advocacy of a courageous and adventurous commercial policy in the regions lately opened to its activities.

A second pamphlet on the same theme was dedicated to Canning, whom the young pamphleteer described as ' not more eminent for his brilliant wit and classic eloquence than for that sedate sublimity of conception which distinguishes the practical statesman from the political theorist,' a thoughtful and well-balanced sentence, which is sufficient to show how admirable were the results of the young writer's long and diligent devotion to the study of classic authors. The association with Mr. Powles and the success of these pamphlets led to a strange adventure. Mr. John Murray had for some time entertained the idea of starting a daily

Conservative paper which should challenge the supremacy that John Walter had achieved for *The Times*. Powles and Murray were strong enough to take the financial risks; in the young pamphleteer they believed they had found the business energy and the literary capacity which would insure success Murray, indeed, seems to have been almost fascinated by the character and genius of his 'young friend Disraeli.' In a letter written at this time to Lockhart he says:

I may frankly say that I never met with a young man of greater promise, from the sterling qualifications which he already possesses. He is a good scholar, a hard student, a deep thinker, of great energy, equal perseverance, and indefatigable application, and a complete man of business. His knowledge of human nature, and the practical tendency of all his ideas, have often surprised me in a young man who has hardly passed his twentieth year, and, above all, his mind and heart are as pure as when they were first formed; a most excellent temper too, and with young people, by whom he is universally beloved, as playful as a child. I have been acquainted with him from his birth, but it is only within the last twelve months that I have known him. I can pledge my honour, therefore, with the assurance that he is worthy of every degree of confidence that you may be induced to repose in him—discretion being another of his qualifications.

An agreement was signed on August 3, 1825, which provided for the publication of a morning paper under Murray's management; half the capital to be found by him, and the other half in equal shares by Powles and Disraeli. For four months Disraeli was very busy. The first important matter was to find an editor, and Murray was anxious to secure Lockhart, a young Scottish advocate who had written some brilliant articles in *Blackwood's Magazine*, and had married the daughter of Sir Walter Scott. So Disraeli was sent off on the four days' journey to

Edinburgh. Armed with such credentials as have been quoted, and gifted with extraordinary powers of persuasion, he could not fail. He spent three weeks at Lockhart's house near Abbotsford; there and at Abbotsford itself was placed on a friendly and familiar footing; and brought Lockhart to London with him prepared to sign a definite agreement. Then with almost incredible energy, and apparently with unlimited authority from Murray to make engagements of every kind, he set to work to interview and engage subeditors and reporters, and to appoint special correspondents for all the most important cities of Europe, as well as for the United States and South America, his chief success being to persuade Dr. Maginn to go to Paris.

Personal difficulties arose later in London, and Disraeli had to pay another visit to Scotland to beg Sir Walter to interfere. He was again successful. Lockhart came up to take his residence in London, and on the 25th of January, 1826, the new paper, named at Disraeli's suggestion *The Representative*, made its appearance.

Then a strange thing happened. From the day that the paper appeared Disraeli had no connection with it of any kind. It started at a most unfortunate time. In the very week of its appearance the unwholesome activity of the City in South American finance had turned to panic, and the speculative companies whose glorious future had been prophesied in his pamphlets fell in ruins round their projectors and their victims.

It was perhaps in reliance on their success that in the beginning of August he had signed the agreement that he would supply one-fourth of the capital needed for the establishment of the new paper. In December he had no capital to supply for anything. Powles was in the same position, and was soon made a bankrupt. Murray struck their names out of the programme, and went on alone. But in losing

Disraeli he lost much more than a fourth share of the capital at stake. He was the soul of the enterprise. His young enthusiasm and brilliant gifts might have made it successful. But Lockhart, quite rightly placed as editor of the *Quarterly Review*, was not fitted for the conduct of a daily paper, and after a respectable but dull existence of half a year, *The Representative* disappeared, and left Murray the loser of £26,000.

BOOK II

LITERATURE, 1824–1837

III. 'VIVIAN GREY' AND TRAVELS
IV. 'CONTARINI FLEMING' AND A DIP INTO POLITICS
V. SOCIETY, 'LYNDHURST,' 'HENRIETTA TEMPLE' AND 'VENETIA'

CHAPTER III

'VIVIAN GREY' AND TRAVELS

The greatest event of this extraordinary year remains to be recorded. In the fragments of rest which Disraeli allowed himself in its later half he wrote the first of the long series of novels which, appearing at intervals during a period of fifty-five years, placed him in the front rank of the novelists of the nineteenth century.

It was almost by accident that he was led to make this notable experiment. In the early autumn of this year, 1825, Isaac D'Israeli was looking out for a country house where he and his family might spend their accustomed holiday, and a solicitor named Austen, who was a friend and neighbour, happened to know that a Mr. Robert Ward, who owned Hyde House, near Amersham, was inclined to let it. A tenancy was arranged, and in August and September young Disraeli spent a few weeks there.

In the previous year a novel of fashionable life, called *Tremaine*, had been published anonymously, and, partly on account of the mystery of its authorship, had attracted much attention, and, although a somewhat feeble production, had achieved a notable success. Of this book Mr. Robert Ward was the author, and the negotiations with Colburn which had concealed this fact from the publisher as well as the public had been carried through by Mr. Austen and his wife, a young woman of much beauty and many literary and other accomplishments. Here indeed was a golden opportunity. Disraeli read *Tremaine* and thought he could produce something better, and, approaching the same publisher through the same

intermediaries, and preserving the same reticence as to the authorship, might earn the money which he sorely needed. So he set to work, and before his twenty-first birthday had written a *Vivian Grey*. No one of his own family, not even his much-loved sister Sarah, was told what he was doing. Mrs. Austen alone was let into the secret; that it might be more surely preserved she copied out the whole manuscript with her own hand, and made the arrangement by which Disraeli received £200 for the copyright. Colburn had seen in the case of the Waverley novels, and had proved in the case of *Tremaine*, how provocative of success a mystery of authorship could be made, and he set to work in many forms of advertisement to excite the public mind to a forthcoming novel by an author whose position compelled him to conceal his name, and whose work, ' extremely satirical,' ' a sort of Don Juan in prose,' with ' portraits of living characters sufficient to constitute a National Gallery,' would shortly flutter the literary and political dovecots.

The novel, in two volumes, was published in April, 1826, and Colburn's advertisements, and the brilliancy of the book itself, secured for it an immediate success. It sold well; criticism was for the most part favourable; and readers and critics found much amusement in trying to identify the characters and to guess the name of their delineator. A second edition was issued in July, and an agreement was made with Colburn for the publication of a sequel, which duly appeared in the following year, and for which the author received £500.

But at the very time the second edition was being hurried through the press the secret of the authorship was revealed, and the angry critics, who found that the work, which had been attributed to all sorts of important political and literary personages, was in fact written by a lad of very scanty experience, fell on the author with jealous malignity. The advertisements of Colburn, with which he had nothing what-

ever to do, were charged against him. He was said to have acquired popularity 'by the meanest and most revolting artifices and the total disregard of all honourable feeling'; was accused of having conspired with Mr. Austen to obtain from Mr. Colburn a large price for the novel by making him believe that it was written by Mr. Robert Ward; and was described by Christopher North in *Blackwood* as 'an obscure person for whom nobody cares a straw.' In later years, through the lips of Contarini Fleming, Disraeli described the astonishment and horror with which he found himself for the first time in his life 'the subject of the most ruthless, the most malignant, and the most adroit ridicule.'

The strain was too great, and when the second edition of the book was published, the author was seriously ill. His faithful friends, the Austens, came to the rescue, and suggested that he should join them in a trip to the Continent. He accepted with delight, and early in August the three friends started on their journey, posting from Boulogne to Paris, and thence by way of Dijon to Geneva. To young Disraeli the trip was an unbroken enjoyment from beginning to end. Freed from the daily annoyances which harassed him in England, free from any responsibility for the arrangements of the journey, enjoying the constant companionship of his closest friends, he found in the change of air and scene an immediate cure for his illness, and threw himself with eager interest into all the new experiences of travel. By the time they reached Dijon the improvement in his health and looks had surprised his companions, and from Geneva he wrote that he had not had an hour's illness since he left England. Restored health brought renewed activity to his pen; and besides writing to his father letters of extraordinary length full of graphic description and shrewd comment, he set down in his diary passages of great literary charm, some of which were almost exactly reproduced in his later novels.

The travellers crossed the Simplon Pass in a storm, loitered a few days by the lakes of Maggiore and Como, and after a short stay at Milan went by way of Padua and Verona to Venice. Here they stayed five days, and Disraeli very willingly surrendered himself to the irresistible spell of the loveliest of all the cities of Europe. He was reluctant to leave it. 'Venice by moonlight,' he wrote, 'is an enchanted city; the floods of silver light on the Moresco architecture, the perfect absence of all harsh sounds of carts and carriages, the never-ceasing music on the waters, produced an effect on the mind which cannot be experienced, I am sure, in any other city of the world.'

They travelled on through Bologna to Florence, and there stayed a fortnight, and Disraeli revelled in the churches and pictures of 'delightful Florence.' Thence by way of Pisa, Lucca, Spezzia, Genoa, Turin, the Mont Cenis Pass, they made their way homeward, and crossed to Dover in the last week of October. So economical had Austen been, or so considerate was he in the apportionment, that Disraeli's share of the expenses of twelve weeks of travel was only about £130. In his latest letters home he said: 'I trust I have not travelled in vain. . . . Five capitals and twelve great cities, innumerable remains of antiquity and the choicest specimens of modern art have told me what man has done and is doing. . . . Everything that I wished has been realised, and more than I wished granted. I have got all the kind of knowledge I desired and much more, but that much more I am convinced was equally necessary.'

The knowledge was not wasted, and the sheaves of manuscript which he brought back from his industrious journey were in due time made use of, but the good health which he thought he had recovered lasted only a very few months.

During the winter he did some literary work, not of a very high quality. *Vivian Grey* in its first and

second editions must have been a commercial success, and Colburn asked for a sequel, and gave him a further £500 for the three additional volumes, which were published in March, 1827. But by the time they appeared Disraeli had been seized with a severe and mysterious illness which for three years, with rare and short periods of relief, afflicted his frame and crippled his intellect. Many doctors were consulted. None of them gave him any consolation. They did not understand the disease, and could not suggest any treatment that would cure it. One of them afterwards said that it was a chronic inflammation of the membrane of the brain. So during these three years his condition was one of constant physical weakness and mental depression, with intermittent attacks of severe pain, and the unceasing pressure of his heavy and increasing debts.

In the summer of 1829 Isaac D'Israeli, chiefly on his son's account, removed from London to a large and pleasant house which he rented at Bradenham, in Buckinghamshire, and here Benjamin spent a year of almost absolute seclusion. Few friends came to visit him, and during the occasional periods of comparatively good health he was afraid to come to London lest his creditors should hear of it and have him arrested. But no trouble could quench his spirit, and in May of 1830 he wrote to the friend who had shared his financial misfortunes: 'There is something within me which, in spite of all the dicta of the faculty, and in the face of the prostrate state in which I lie, whispers to me I shall yet weather this fearful storm, and that a more prosperous career may yet open to me.'

When these words were written a gleam of light had visited the courageous sufferer. The enjoyment of his trip to the Continent with the Austens had given him a strong desire to extend his travels to lands farther east, and especially to 'the ancient land of Priestcraft and of Pyramids' so closely associated with the

history of his race. And there was another influence which led him eastwards. In his boyhood he had been greatly attracted by the story of the brilliant adventure of David Alroy, the political Messiah of the twelfth century, whose marvellous career had even then seemed to him to have been fraught with the richest materials of poetic fiction, and at some time in later years he had made the beginnings of a novel on this subject. His father, however, would not provide the means for a somewhat costly expedition, and Disraeli was obliged to obtain them by hack work for the publisher whom he called 'tempting Mother Colburn.' 'Hacking' was the term he himself applied to the writing of *The Young Duke*, which he produced during his occasional freedom from mental disability. It was a brilliant and wilfully exaggerated example of the fashionable novel which Colburn found to pay so well, and the receipt of £500 as the price of the manuscript, together with a loan from the faithful Austen, and the consent of Meredith, who was now engaged to his sister, to accompany him on the journey, helped to hasten his recovery from illness. In the first week of July, 1830, the two travellers left England for Spain.

This journey was one of the most important events in Benjamin Disraeli's life. His mind was already well stored with classical literature, and with the history of ancient and modern times. Now the dry and musty records suddenly took on form and life as he looked upon the scenes where great events had determined the fate of nations, and studied in leisurely and observant contact the character of the unchanging races to whom the future of the world belongs. Spain, Greece, Turkey, Palestine, Egypt—he saw them all, and saw them not with hurried and careless glances, but with deliberate study and thoughtful recollection. In Spain the travellers spent two months, and those two months of almost continuous exposure to the Spanish sunlight of July and August nearly, but not quite, burned out of him the last

remains of his illness. During his whole life he suffered in cold and windy weather. Every year April and October sorely tried him. The two months in Spain were an unbroken enjoyment. He wrote to his mother: 'My general health was never better. You know how much better I am on a sunny day in England; well, I have had two months of sunny days infinitely warmer. I have during all this period enjoyed general health of which I have no memory during my life.'

It will be enough to sketch lightly the course of the travellers' journey. Some weeks were spent at Malta, and here, writing on September 14, he complains of feeling dispirited, 'as my great friend the sun is daily becoming less powerful.' But there were days of very high spirits indeed. The inclination to extravagance of dress which was always a characteristic of young Disraeli, and did not entirely disappear in his later years, showed itself at Malta in costumes which excited the contemptuous amusement of the military residents. Even when he was in a solicitor's office some peculiarities of dress had been noticed, and when he came to London in March, 1830, with the manuscript of *The Young Duke*, he quite enjoyed the sensation he created by walking up Regent Street in a blue surtout, light blue trousers, black stockings with red stripes, and shoes. He went to dine with Edward Bulwer at Hertford Street in green velvet trousers, a canary coloured waistcoat, and lace at his wrists. Now at Malta he dined at a regimental mess in Andalusian costume, and paid a round of visits, including one to the Governor and his lady, in a Spanish jacket, white trousers, and a sash of all the colours of the rainbow. He wrote proudly to his brother: 'You should see me in the costume of a Greek pirate. A blood-red shirt, with silver studs as big as shillings, an immense scarf for girdle full of pistols and daggers, red cap, red slippers, broad blue striped jacket and trousers.'

A month at Malta was followed by a week at Corfu, and then the three travellers—for James Clay had joined them—went on to Albania, and were received and made much of by the Grand Vizier, Mehemet Ali, who was ruthlessly subduing a serious rebellion, and re-establishing Turkish rule in the province. Disraeli enjoyed himself immensely. 'I am,' he wrote, 'quite a Turk, wear a turban, smoke a pipe six feet long, and squat on a divan.'

The stay in Albania lasted only a week; then a month was spent in loitering among the Ionian Islands; and at the end of November Athens was reached. Greece did not detain them long, and early in December Disraeli, to his great delight, found himself at Constantinople. As the boat neared the great city he wrote: 'It is near sunset, and Constantinople is in full sight; it baffles all description, though so often described. An immense mass of buildings, cupolas, cyprus groves, and minarets. I feel an excitement which I thought was dead.'

The five weeks of continuous enjoyment which he spent here and his shrewd and careful observation of national and racial characteristics had very notable results. A new world had come into his ken. In the books which he wrote during or after this journey there are firmly drawn pictures of Eastern scenes, and studies of Eastern character, which only a personal experience could render possible. And in his political, no less than in his literary, future the influence of this experience could be clearly traced. After Constantinople came Jerusalem. He only stayed there a week, but that week was, he declared, 'the most delightful of all our travels.' Here he had a serious adventure. Clad in Eastern costume he tried to enter the Mosque of Omar. But he had hardly crossed the threshold and had a glimpse of 'splendid courts and gates, arcades and gardens,' when he was detected, and with difficulty escaped the violence of a crowd of furious fanatics.

Then to crown and close his journeyings he spent four months in Egypt. Here he found, as he had expected, interest and pleasure surpassing all that had come to him in other lands. He climbed the Pyramids; he discussed forms of constitutional government with Mehemet Ali; he travelled by boat seven hundred miles up the Nile to the very confines of Nubia; and spent a week in Thebes, where, in the instructive companionship of Sir Gardner Wilkinson, he studied the famous remains. 'As for Dendera and Thebes, and the remains in every part of Upper Egypt,' he said in a letter to his sister, 'it is useless to attempt to write. Italy and Greece were toys to them. Conceive a feverish and tumultuous dream, full of triumphal gates, processions of paintings, interminable walls of heroic sculpture, granite colossi of gods and kings, prodigious obelisks, avenues of sphinxes, and halls of a thousand columns thirty feet in girth and of a proportionate height. My eyes and mind yet ache with a grandeur so little in unison with our own littleness.'

But the year of enjoyment which had begun at Gibraltar in July of 1830 was to close very sadly. Meredith, his friend and companion, dear to him not only for personal qualities of mind and heart, but because Disraeli had in immediate prospect the happy marriage of the sister to whom his own fondest love was given, was stricken by smallpox, and died at Cairo after only a few days of illness.

It was to a sad household at Bradenham that the surviving traveller returned.

CHAPTER IV

'CONTARINI FLEMING' AND A DIP INTO POLITICS

The next five years of Benjamin Disraeli's life were passed in a turmoil of varied literature and violent journalism, of social successes and extravagances, of fantastic politics and occasional election contests, and constant, and constantly increasing, financial troubles. He returned to England with two novels almost completed. One, *Contarini Fleming*, was to his thinking the best of all his works. It was a picture of himself, a psychological romance in which he described the influences which had moulded his character, and given a bent to his ambition. The other, *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy*, he described as 'the celebration of a gorgeous incident in the annals of that sacred and romantic people from whom I derive my blood and name.'

He spent the greater part of the winter at Bradenham, working hard at the closing volume of *Contarini Fleming*, and came up to London in February with the completed manuscript. Murray was in some doubt as to publishing it, but the poet-priest Milman, whose opinion he asked, said that it was 'very powerful, very poetical, and would be much read, much admired, and much abused,' and this removed the doubt, and he published it in four volumes in May, 1832. To the author's surprise and great disappointment it had no popular success. 'It has not paid its expenses. *Vivian Grey*, with faults which even youth can scarcely excuse—in short, the most unequal, imperfect, irregular thing that indiscretion ever published—has sold thousands, and eight years after its publication a new edition is announced to-day.' So

the author of both wrote in 1833. Nearly forty years after, when he wrote a General Preface to a second collected edition of his novels, he said: 'I published *Contarini Fleming* anonymously and in the midst of a revolution, and having written it with great thought and feeling I was naturally discouraged from further effort. Yet the youthful writer who may, like me, be inclined to despair, may learn also from my example not to be precipitate in his resolves.'

During the few weeks between his coming to the rooms he took in Duke Street, St. James's, and the publication of *Contarini Fleming*, Disraeli made his appearance in London society at the house in Hertford Street, where Edward Bulwer and his young wife had occasional assemblies. Bulwer and he had made acquaintance three years earlier, when Bulwer, who was only one year his senior, and had sprung into fame by the production of *Pelham*, a brilliant novel of social life, had some correspondence with Isaac D'Israeli on literary subjects. The acquaintance soon developed into a warm and enduring friendship. Each of the two young men sincerely admired the writings of the other, and valued his good opinion. Disraeli sent the manuscript of *The Young Duke* to Bulwer for his perusal and opinion. Bulwer wrote a long letter somewhat severely criticising the style of some passages. Disraeli was so disheartened by the criticism that he determined not to publish the book. In a frank and cordial letter Bulwer protested against this resolve and the book appeared. A friendship that could survive this incident was proof against time and change. Thirty years later Bulwer was a Secretary of State under Lord Derby's premiership, and six years afterwards Disraeli obtained for Bulwer the peerage he desired.

At the Hertford Street assemblies Disraeli met the most notable of the literary men and women of the time, and formed a very pleasant and useful friendship with Mrs. Norton. Political leaders he met at Lord

Eliot's, where he frequently dined. In May he there formed one of a party of eight, all save himself members of one or the other House of Parliament, and sat next to Sir Robert Peel, of whom he wrote to his sister: 'Peel was most gracious. He is a very great man, and they all seem afraid of him.' Within a month of this meeting Disraeli was unexpectedly plunged into his first election contest. High Wycombe, a small country town not far from Bradenham, was the place he had selected for his attempt to enter the House of Commons. It was a tiny constituency of less than 400 electors who returned two members, and Disraeli was looking forward to the election which would necessarily soon follow the coming into effect of the Reform Bill which had just been passed. His appeal would be made, not to the few well-drilled supporters of the present members, but to the new and more independent electors who would for the first time be exercising the franchise. An accident forced him into an earlier contest. A seat became vacant in Hampshire, and one of the members for High Wycombe resigned his seat there, and went off to an unopposed election in the county constituency. Disraeli was already in the town canvassing the future electors. It was troublesome to have to spend time and money in attempting to gain a seat which would only be held for a few months, but the opportunity of becoming known to the larger constituency could not be wasted, and he was duly nominated. On June 9 Colonel Grey, the second son of the Prime Minister, and the official Whig candidate, drove into the town, with a band and a hired mob marching behind his phaeton, and, speaking from the carriage, he made a short and feeble declaration of his political faith. Disraeli's own opinions at the time are hard to define. He had just declared in an anonymous pamphlet to which he contributed: 'I am neither Whig nor Tory. My politics are described by one word, and that word is England.' But the ambiguity of his political creed

by no means unfitted it for copious exposition in the brilliant volubility which was characteristic of Disraeli's utterances in conversation or oratory or writing. He sprang at the opportunity. He was staying at the Red Lion Hotel in the High Street, and when Colonel Grey had finished his poor little speech, his young opponent was seen standing by the figure of the lion which surmounted the portico of the hotel. Dressed in the excess of fashion, with lace fluttering at his throat and wrists, Disraeli looked down upon the crowd that filled the street, and with sonorous voice and dramatic gesture delivered a speech such as no elector of Wycombe had ever before heard. For more than an hour the rush of his tempestuous eloquence stilled them to silence or roused them to enthusiasm. It could not, of course, affect the result of this contest, and when a few days later the poll was held, Colonel Grey had twenty votes and Disraeli only twelve.

The early autumn was spent at Bradenham, and *Alroy* was prepared for the printer; and in early December came the General Election. Disraeli came forward again, and in preparation for the contest he had published on October 19 the first number of a weekly paper called '*The Wycombe Sentinel*, edited and published by Benjamin Disraeli. Printed by King, Wycombe.' This contained his address and his speeches, and was distributed gratis in the town for eight successive weeks. This time he expected to win, and he came somewhat near it, for while the Hon. Robert Smith, the son and heir of the local magnate, Lord Carrington, polled 179 votes, Grey had only 140, and Disraeli 119. It was, he said, the fault of his negligent agent that he was not returned.

The election over, Disraeli returned to London and resumed the expensive habits of the gayest and most fashionable society. In the strange collection of occasional memoranda, which took with him the place of an orderly diary, he recorded, under the date of

September 3, 1833, 'I have passed the whole of this year in uninterrupted lounging and pleasure.'

But when he wrote this he was preparing for the most ambitious, and the least successful, of all his literary efforts. When he was at Athens, three years earlier, the idea had occurred to him that the time had come for a great poet to write a noble epic of the modern world. He recalled the mighty names of Homer and Virgil and Dante and Milton, and was daring enough to believe that he could add his name to the stately list. Now he determined to devote the winter to the production of *The Revolutionary Epic*. 'I imagine,' he said, 'the Genius of Feudalism and the Genius of Federalism appearing before the Almighty Throne and pleading their respective and antagonistic causes. The pleading of the Feudal Genius, in which I say all that can be urged in favour of the aristocratic system of society, forms the first book; the pleading of the Federal the second; the decree of the Omnipotent is mystical. It declares that a man is born of superhuman energies, and that whichever side he embraces will succeed, or to that effect. The man is Napoleon, just about to conquer Italy. The spirits descend to earth to join him. He adopts the Federal or Democratic side. The Feudal stirs up the Kings against him.' The scheme was prodigious. The completed work was to occupy thirty thousand lines, but Disraeli wisely decided to try the public taste by printing only four thousand lines as a first instalment. He worked for three or four months at Bradenham with admirable diligence, passing long and solitary days in unceasing study and composition. When the first canto was finished he came to town to dine with the Austens, and read or recited it to them. Unfortunately, Mrs. Austen had not the courage or the kindness to tell him how poor it was. Perhaps her personal regard for the author perverted her judgement. Himself perfectly satisfied that he was producing a masterpiece of literature, he returned to Bradenham, and continued

his labours. The first canto was published in March, 1834, and two more cantos appeared two months later. It was, as it deserved to be, a complete failure. But the disappointed author remained under the delusion that he was a poet. A few years later he had the courage to introduce Byron into the novel of *Venetia*, and to attribute to him some verses which certainly Byron would never have owned. In 1837 he resolved to correct and complete the work, and this was only prevented by his election to Parliament in that year. Nearly thirty years later he complacently republished the three cantos.

CHAPTER V

SOCIETY, LYNDHURST, 'HENRIETTA TEMPLE,' AND 'VENETIA'

DISRAELI returned from his wasted labour at Bradenham to plunge again into the delights of London society. Quite reckless of the heavy clouds of debt which were gathering about him, and revelling in the admiring welcome with which his extravagant costume and his brilliant conversational eloquence were everywhere received, he spent his days and nights in social dissipation. He had, as he himself recorded in one of his fragmentary notes, 'a season of unparalleled success and gaiety.' Balls at Almacks and elsewhere (though he never danced); frequent visits to the opera, and gay suppers afterwards with his noble friends; dinners with the fortunate ladies, whose invitations were selected for acceptance from the multitude which came to his lodgings; assemblies at the most famous houses—these formed during four or five months of 1834 the exciting occupation of his life. He had, indeed, a novel in preparation. *Henrietta Temple* had been begun in the previous year, but there is no record of its being touched during this feverish period of enjoyment. The names of some of his hostesses, found in his letters or his casual diary, form a list of the most noted ladies in high society at that date. Lady Cork, Lady Salisbury, the Duchess of St. Albans, the Duchess of Hamilton, Lady Sykes, Lady Dudley Stuart, were among them. And the names of Mrs. Norton and Lady Blessington must not be omitted, for with both of them there was a great and lasting friendship. Disraeli knew the famous Sheridan sisters in 1833, and saw much of them in the following year.

They all admired and flattered him, and Mrs. Norton quoted his books to him, and gave him her portrait. It was at her house in Storey's Gate that in the early part of 1834 he was introduced to Lord Melbourne, who was then Home Secretary in the Ministry of Lord Grey. They talked about politics, though probably it was for the most part Disraeli who talked and Lord Melbourne who listened, and presently the elder politician said, 'Well, now, tell me what you want to be.' 'I want to be Prime Minister.' Fifteen years later Melbourne heard that Disraeli was to lead the Tory party in the House of Commons. He recalled the strange conversation, and exclaimed, 'By God, the fellow will do it yet.' Disraeli's friendship with Lady Blessington, a friendship close and sincere, lasted for many years, and when he married, one of the earliest visits he and his wife paid in London was paid to her. In May, 1834, he dined at the house in Seamore Place at which, as afterwards at Gore House, Lady Blessington and Count D'Orsay, the acknowledged queen of beauty and the unquestioned arbiter of masculine fashion, were making their splendid progress along the road to ruin. They gave fine dinners, at which Disraeli became a very frequent and very welcome and conspicuous guest. He was always inclined to the society of women older than himself. Mrs. Austen, who had been his helper and adviser in his first days of authorship, was several years his senior. Now he turned to Lady Blessington, who had been married to her first husband in the year of Disraeli's birth. Lady Blessington was a woman of remarkable personal charm, of considerable literary ability, and of untiring industry. She strove, with but little success, to make her earnings by novels, and books of beauty, and contributions to the newly started *Daily News*, support the extravagance of her household expenses. For the next three years she was Disraeli's chief confidante and adviser in his literary work. At the houses which have been mentioned Disraeli had made the

acquaintance of most of the prominent public men. Peel, Durham, Melbourne, O'Connell, 'young Gladstone,' and many others are mentioned in his letters. But it was not until July, 1834, that he began his friendship with the man who was thenceforward to have the strongest influence on his political opinions and his public action. His meeting Lord Lyndhurst at a dinner party on July 10 was the turning point of his career. The introduction and the conversation must have been full of interest to both. The great lawyer, who was called to the Bar thirty years before, had, after fifteen brilliant years of practice, travelled up the steps of Solicitor-General, Attorney-General, Master of the Rolls, and Lord Chancellor, and after three years upon the Woolsack, had, after the fall of the Duke of Wellington's administration in 1830, been appointed Chief Baron of the Exchequer. Four years' experience of his judicial qualities in that office had proved that his political opponents, Lord Grey, the new Prime Minister, and Brougham, his successor as Lord Chancellor, had done a great public service in inviting him to accept it. But he was still an eager politician. In the debates of the House of Lords it was only Brougham who could challenge his pre-eminence; his stately figure and musical voice and his 'sweet disposition, with a temper that nothing could ruffle,' made him a favourite in any society; his close friendship with Wellington and Peel, and their confidence in his experienced judgement, could not fail to give him a potent influence in the councils of the Tory party. He was precisely the person through whom a young aspirant to political distinction might hope to obtain recognition and success.

Disraeli must have realised the value of his opportunity; and Lyndhurst was meeting for the first time the brilliant young novelist who had shown by his writings and by his speeches at High Wycombe that, although his political views were at present somewhat fantastic and undefined, he would be a very valuable

recruit for the party he might decide to join. The meeting was opportune, and it occurred at the very moment when its importance must have been most keenly realised by them both.

The day before, on July 9, 1834, Lord Grey had resigned. His Ministry, triumphant in the Reform Bill victory of 1832, had been sorely weakened by the secession of Durham in 1833, and had now, in May, 1834, sustained a fatal blow in the desertion of Lord Stanley and Sir James Graham. It was soon known that on the morning of the 11th the King had sent for Lord Melbourne and had given him a memorandum expressing the royal wish that Wellington and Peel and Stanley would join with some members of the Government which had just resigned in forming a new administration. The Chief Baron was away on circuit when Grey's resignation took place, but when he met Disraeli on the evening of the 10th, he can hardly have been ignorant that a crisis had occurred which would very probably lead to the formation of a Tory Government. He must have known that neither Melbourne nor Peel would consent to a coalition. The difficulty was solved in a very few days by the appointment of Lord Melbourne as Prime Minister in a feeble and phantom administration which only lasted four months. But the interview between the experienced statesman and the ambitious young politician had notable and long-enduring results. They took to each other at once. Not very much was said about politics, the situation was not one which could be freely discussed, but Lyndhurst yielded willingly to Disraeli's all-conquering charm. The friendship, which remained unbroken until the death of Lyndhurst twenty-nine years later, was firmly founded by the conversation of that evening. Lyndhurst was arranging to go abroad in the autumn with a family party, and he invited his newly found friend to join them. The invitation was not accepted, for Disraeli had resolved to spend the autumn at Bradenham. He had in the previous year

written one volume of *Henrietta Temple*, and he intended to finish the story and publish it at the end of the year. But in August he had a strange and serious illness which confined him to the sofa for two months. When this illness had passed away Lyndhurst was back in London, and the acquaintance which had begun so pleasantly at once ripened into a close and confidential friendship. During the confused political events of the closing months of that year, of which the best account is to be found in *Coningsby*—the death of Lord Spencer, the dismissal of Lord Melbourne's Government, and the curious interregnum of four weeks while Peel was being fetched back from Italy—Disraeli shared all the knowledge and the hopes of the Tory leaders. Wellington and Lyndhurst, there being no Prime Minister, 'got the Government of the country into their own hands' (to use Wellington's phrase), the Duke sitting at the Treasury and taking all the seals of the Secretaries of State; and Lyndhurst taking the Great Seal, and sitting as Chancellor, while still remaining the Chief Baron. Wellington was a practical man. He said to Lyndhurst: 'You and I must be the Government of the country.' So they were for a month, and the King and the country were quite content. Then Peel arrived and became Prime Minister; Wellington took the Foreign Office, and Lyndhurst somewhat reluctantly gave up the safe £7,000 a year of his judicial post, and returned to the larger but precarious income of the Chancellorship.

When the new Ministry was completed Disraeli described it as 'a provisional Government,' for in his view it was 'a weak Cabinet, containing many feeble, and some odious, names.'

By this time the Duke of Wellington was in full accord with Lyndhurst as to Disraeli's value to the party, and they both made vigorous efforts to persuade Lord Carrington to give him his support at the General Election. High Wycombe was really in Carrington's

hands, and if he had exerted himself in the slightest degree in his favour, Disraeli must have been returned. He, however, would do nothing. His inaction was understood as opposition, and again Disraeli was defeated. The disappointment was severe, but it was courageously met. A fortnight later Lord Chandos presided at a Tory dinner at High Wycombe, and there the thrice-defeated candidate said: 'I am not at all disheartened. I do not in any way feel like a beaten man. Perhaps it is because I am used to it. I will say of myself, like the famous Italian general, who, being asked in his old age why he was always victorious, replied it was because he had always been beaten in his youth.'

The 'provisional Government' lasted only five months, and in April, 1835, Peel resigned and Melbourne came back to office. But before this took place a very remarkable negotiation had been opened by Lord Melbourne in which Disraeli was the trusted intermediary. The only detailed and contemporary account of this incident is in a letter (not published until seventy-five years later) which Disraeli wrote to his father on April 17, 1835, and which Isaac D'Israeli preserved, although it contained the sentence, 'You now know all the secrets of affairs, which not ten people do in the realm, and you must burn this letter when read.'

When Peel resigned, Mrs. Norton, at the wish of Lord Melbourne, wrote to Disraeli and asked him to come and see her. He went, and the interview lasted two hours. She told him that Grey and Melbourne and all the old aristocratic Whigs were desirous of forming a coalition with Peel and Lyndhurst and their followers. It was a renewal of the suggestion made by the King a year before, which both Melbourne and Peel had then rejected. But this time Lord Melbourne, she said, was prepared to support it, and wished, as she did, that the affair should be arranged by Lyndhurst. He and his friends would have

nothing to do with O'Connell or the English and Scotch Radicals, and would be supported by a considerable section of their party, headed by Lord Seymour. Disraeli went to Lyndhurst at once, and spent a couple of hours with him discussing the proposal. Then he saw Mrs. Norton again, and asked the vital question whether Melbourne would consent to serve under Peel. She said he had positively agreed to do so, and that Lyndhurst would be Chancellor in the place of Brougham. There were several interviews. Disraeli saw Lord Seymour, who was a party to the negotiation, and found no difficulty in that direction. But the project came to nothing. Lyndhurst and Peel believed that the Whigs could not form a Government. Disraeli, writing this letter to his father 'in the highest spirits,' said: 'I think myself Peel will be again sent for by the King.' They were all mistaken. Melbourne formed a new Government which lasted for six years, and gave the country the inestimable benefit of providing the young Queen, who came to the throne four years before its end, with a wise and kindly friend and counsellor during the first and most difficult decade of her illustrious reign.

In April, 1835, the member for Taunton was appointed Master of the Mint in the new Ministry, and Disraeli was sent down to oppose his re-election. A subscription was opened at the Carlton Club, of which he was not yet a member, to pay his expenses, and he made a brilliant fight, and gained the show of hands, which no Tory candidate had ever done in that constituency. But to oppose the re-election of a member just appointed to public office always seems ungracious, and is seldom successful, and he was beaten by a large majority. His conduct during the election and the brilliancy of his speeches had excited great enthusiasm in the Conservative ranks, and a few weeks later he was entertained at an important banquet, at which grateful acknowledgment was

made of the service which his spirited candidature had rendered to the Tory party. A friendly but critical observer who was present at the election and the banquet wrote a lively description of his appearance and his oratory:

Never in my life had I been so struck by a face as I was by that of Disraeli. It was lividly pale, and from beneath two finely arched eyebrows blazed out a pair of intensely black eyes. His physiognomy was strictly Jewish. Over a broad, high forehead were ringlets of coal-black glossy hair which, combed away from his right temple, fell in luxuriant clusters or bunches over his left cheek and ear, which it entirely concealed from view. There was a sort of half-smile, half-sneer, playing about his beautifully formed mouth, the upper lip of which was curved as we see it in the portraits of Byron. . . . He was very showily attired in a dark bottle-green frock-coat, a waistcoat of the most extravagant pattern, the front of which was almost covered with glittering chains, and fancy pattern pantaloons. He wore a plain black stock, but no collar was visible. Altogether he was the most intellectual-looking exquisite I have ever seen. . . . He commenced his speech at the banquet in a lisping, lackadaisical sort of voice. He minced his phrases in apparently the most affected manner, and, whilst he was speaking, placed his hands in all imaginable positions; not because he felt awkward, and did not know, like a booby in a drawing-room, where to put them, but apparently for the purpose of exhibiting to the best advantage the glittering rings which decked his white and taper fingers. Now he would place his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and spread out his fingers on its flashing surface; then one set of digits would be released and he would lean affectedly on the table, supporting himself with his right hand; anon he would push aside the curls from his forehead. . . . But as he proceeded all traces of this dandyism and affectation were lost. With a rapidity of utterance perfectly astonishing he referred to past events and indulged in anticipation of the future. . . . His voice, at first so finical, gradually became full, musical, and sonorous, and with every varying senti-

ment was beautifully modulated. His arms no longer appeared to be exhibited for show, but he exemplified the eloquence of the hand. The dandy was transformed into the man of mind, the Mantalini-looking personage into a practised orator and finished elocutionist.*

Disraeli returned from Taunton to take his enjoyable and now conspicuous place in the best circles of London society. But this year was by no means passed in uninterrupted lounging and pleasure. His energies were now directed into a new channel. During the brief existence of Sir Robert Peel's Ministry an interesting dinner took place at Lord Lyndhurst's house. Disraeli then for the first time met two young men to whom the Prime Minister had given office. W. E. Gladstone, five years his junior, had the interesting post of Under-Secretary for the Colonies, and Winthrop Mackworth Praed was Secretary to the Board of Trade. Praed had for some time been writing for the *Morning Post*, and had closed his connection with that paper when he took office in the Ministry.

Denied the opportunity which these more fortunate ones enjoyed of making his voice heard in the House of Commons, Disraeli turned eagerly to the influence of the Press, and very soon after this dinner, and perhaps in consequence of some conversation there, he was contributing to the *Morning Post* day by day leading articles and anonymous letters in which the Whig Government which had returned to office was attacked with great vigour and with violent invective. The articles and letters, very hastily written, were not worthy of their author, but he wrote complacently to his sister about the effect they were producing in political circles. When the session ended, Lord Lyndhurst spent a fortnight at Bradenham, and at his suggestion Disraeli planned and prepared the most

* *Life*, i., 282, 'Pen and Ink Sketches of Poets, Preachers and Politicians.' London, 1846.

important of his political writings. The *Vindication of the English Constitution in a Letter to a Noble and Learned Lord, by Disraeli the Younger,* was published in December, 1835. The fame of the great novelist has obscured the memory of his earlier writings on the science of government, or this brilliant essay, expounding principles which were splendidly translated into action in his later years, would be recognised as an English classic. It is still deeply interesting to every student of political history, and especially to all who interest themselves in the great career of its author. Lord Lyndhurst said with truth that it was 'a masterly union of learning and skill and eloquence.' It had immediately a wide circulation and an admiring welcome. And it brought to the writer a letter from his father which must have made him very happy. Isaac D'Israeli had been a shrewd and somewhat severe critic of his son's literary work. Now he wrote:

December 23, 1835.

Your vulgar birthday was, it seems, last Monday, but your nobler political birth has occurred this week, and truly, like the fable of old, you have issued into existence armed in the full panoply of the highest wisdom. You have now a positive *name* and a *being* in the great political world which you had not ten days ago. It is for you to preserve the wide reputation which I am positive is now secured.

Disraeli had by this time formed a close and useful friendship with Barnes, the very able editor of *The Times,* and he followed up the *Vindication* by the *Runnymede Letters,* a series of nineteen open letters to prominent public men which appeared in that paper in the early months of 1836. The letters were remarkable for the vigour of their invective and the diligent ingenuity with which an extraordinarily familiar knowledge of political events and personal relations and incidents is used to point sarcasm or to sustain an eulogium. But the most remarkable fact

about them was that Disraeli never publicly acknowledged their authorship, and believed, as his letters to his sister proved, that his responsibility for them was not discovered. When they were republished, along with an essay on *The Spirit of Whiggism*, which reproduced the opinions and almost the phrases of the *Vindication*, the truth was obvious. It might have been expected that he would have made use of this friendly connection with the two most important newspapers of that day to find some relief from the financial troubles which were pressing upon him. His social enjoyment and his political adventures had been expensive. Two years had passed since he had received anything important from Colburn, and a mysterious business which took him twice to Holland, and from which he hoped to receive a thousand pounds, had come to nothing. But for some reason which it is not easy to divine his journalistic work was then and always unpaid. He said in later life that he had never required or received any remuneration for anything he had ever written except for the books published under his own name. And, although he had long found out, as he declared in *Ixion*, that 'there is nothing so harassing as a want of money,' he could not be persuaded to reveal to his father the extent of his difficulties. He said that he had disappointed his father in refusing to follow a profession, and that he was resolved to achieve his independence. He would not appeal to friends; so he went to professional money-lenders, and persuaded them to lend him money at exorbitant rates of interest with no security except his assurances of ultimate repayment. In the summer of 1836 he found himself in a parlous condition. In London he was in constant fear of being arrested for debt. In July he wrote to his solicitor: 'Peel has asked me to dine to-day with a party of the late Government at the Carlton. Is it safe? I fear not.'

In September he fled for safety to Bradenham, but

even there he was afraid that sheriff's officers might make their appearance. He had been sworn in as a Justice of the Peace in August, and this 'would be confusion.' He hardly ventured outside the house. But he made the best use of his enforced seclusion. He had told his father a few weeks earlier that he had agreed to let Colburn have a novel for a greater sum than he had ever received, and he now set to work to complete *Henrietta Temple* and to follow it with *Venetia*. Regardless of money troubles, and a somewhat alarming attack of illness, he wrote with extraordinary diligence, and with a brilliance of imagination and expression which makes these two books among the most delightful of all his novels. There is nothing more remarkable in the history of English literature than the amount and quality of the matter produced by the fertile brain and the untiring hand which worked together during those autumn months. In November he wrote to his solicitor: 'My situation is simply this. I have taken advantage of the temporary repose for which I am indebted to you, and with the exception of county business I have not quitted my room for the last ten weeks. I have now written four octavo volumes—*i.e.*, the novel about to be published, and two more of another which I contemplate finishing by the end of the year.' Early in December *Henrietta Temple* was published, and was immediately recognised as belonging to the highest class of fiction. Thirty years later, when its author had reached the highest point of a British politician's ambition, Alfred Tennyson, writing to thank him for prompt attention to a trifling request, gracefully said that he was quite as much pleased to know that it was owing to the author of that charming love story *Henrietta Temple* as to the Prime Minister of England. From the point of view of author and of publisher this was the most successful book Disraeli had produced since the appearance of *Vivian Grey* twelve years before.

This book out of hand, Disraeli made a short but by no means unimportant excursion into politics. At a Conservative banquet at Aylesbury which he ventured to attend, although he had some fear of 'being nabbed,' he proposed the toast of 'the House of Lords.' The editor of *The Times* sent down a staff of reporters, and gave a long account of the demonstration, and showed his gratitude to his brilliant contributor in the way most delightful to a public speaker, the giving his speech in the first person. His sister wrote rejoicing: 'Now you must be satisfied that you have succeeded in doing that which you have so much desired—viz., to make a speech that would be talked of all over England.' At Strathfieldsaye the Duke of Wellington said, 'That speech was the most manly thing done yet; when will he come into Parliament?' Lyndhurst wrote: 'The Bucks dinner was a great demonstration, and has placed you in an admirable position as far as character and reputation are concerned. It will be infamous if it is not followed up by some effort to place you in a position which may give the party the full benefit of your talents, and of your activity and untiring zeal.'

Christmas found Disraeli back at Bradenham at work upon *Venetia*. It was a book which, as he truly said, was 'in a higher vein' than *Henrietta Temple*, and no one who reads the story can doubt that he took a keen delight in drawing the shadow figures of Byron and Shelley. He did not know that eight years would pass before his industrious pen would again be busy with a work of fiction, and that the opportunities so diligently sought, and so long and disappointingly delayed, were shortly to open his path to the career decreed by his indomitable will.

This chapter, which finishes the record of his years of preparation, may fitly close with an extract from a letter written to his solicitor on December 26, 1836. It has pleasant touches of contentment and confident hope. 'I assure you that when I reached the old hall

and found the beech blocks crackling and blazing, I felt no common sentiments of gratitude to that kind friend whose never tired zeal allowed me to reach my house, and to find some consolation for the plague of women, the wear and tear of politics, and the dunning of creditors. We are now, however, comparatively in smooth waters, thanks to your pilotage, and I am at work again animated by success and by the greatness of future results.' While he was writing the final chapters of *Venetia*, the busy worlds of society and politics were suddenly disturbed by the serious illness of the King. The novel was published in May, and a month later the accession of Victoria, and the General Election which followed, set Disraeli on the stage of responsibility and achievement.

BENJAMIN DISRAELI, 1834.

From a portrait by Count D'Orsay.

To face p. 46.

BOOK III

PARLIAMENT, 1838–1853

VI. PARLIAMENT AND MARRIAGE
VII. MEMBER FOR SHREWSBURY
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CHAPTER VI

PARLIAMENT AND MARRIAGE

The first fortnight of the new reign, which began on June 20, 1837, was a time of great excitement and anxiety to Disraeli. His writings and speeches had now placed him in the front line of fighters on the Tory side, and Wellington and Lyndhurst were both anxious to see him returned to the House of Commons. But his position was difficult. A county seat was out of the question, for the cost would be enormous, and he had no money to spend. And of the boroughs which were offered him—Derby, Chichester, Dartmouth, Marylebone, Taunton, Ashburton, Barnstaple—there was hardly one which would give him more than the hope of success in a hard struggle. And to him it was all-important that he should now succeed. To be again defeated might mean his exclusion from Parliament for six or seven years, and now, at thirty-three years of age, he could not afford to wait while men younger and less capable than he were establishing themselves in administrative experience and senatorial authority. But the risk had to be taken, and he was on the point of starting for Barnstaple when an invitation came from Maidstone which was too promising to be refused, and which in its ultimate results gave him not only political success, but thirty-three years of domestic happiness.

Five years before this date he had been introduced at an assembly at Bulwer's house to Mrs. Wyndham Lewis, the wife of a wealthy Conservative who was senior member for the borough of Maidstone, having a Liberal as his colleague. In a letter to his sister he told her of the introduction ' by particular desire ' to

' Mrs. Wyndham Lewis, a pretty little woman, a flirt, and a rattle.' The impression he made upon the lady was much more favourable; and from that time he was an occasional guest at her dinners and assemblies at their pleasant house in Park Lane. When the election contest was beginning, she went to Maidstone with her husband to help in retaining his seat as senior member, but with no thought of attempting to oust his Liberal colleague. But the first two days of canvassing showed that his supporters were so numerous and so confident that it would not be difficult to bring in a second Conservative. Her thoughts turned at once to Disraeli, and the upshot was that almost at the last moment of his freedom from engagement elsewhere he was invited to stand for a constituency where success was almost certain, and where the main cost of the contest, and of subsequent political expenses, would be borne by his fellow-candidate.

There was nearly a month of noisy electioneering, and, as had been the case in his former contests, the new-comer was pursued through the streets with cries of ' Shylock ' and ' Old Clo '; but the result was never in doubt, and Lewis and he were returned by good majorities over the Liberal candidate. Mrs. Wyndham Lewis, in great delight, wrote the following day to her brother:

Mark well what I say—mark what I prophesy: Mr. Disraeli will in a very few years be one of the greatest men of his day. His great talents, backed by his friends Lord Lyndhurst and Lord Chandos, with Wyndham's power to keep him in Parliament, will insure his success. They call him my Parliamentary protégé.

The tone of mixed admiration and patronage was quite natural. Mrs. Wyndham Lewis was twelve years older than Disraeli, and there seemed little doubt that she and her husband would be able to give him effective help in the political career to which she

so confidently looked forward. A month after the election they went to stay at Bradenham, and a letter in which she describes the visit deserves quotation for its account of the congenial home in which the best of Disraeli's literary work was done, and of the wise and affectionate father to whom he owed so much.

September 8th, 1837.

I have been paying a visit to Mr. Disraeli's family. They reside near High Wycombe—a large family house, most of the rooms 30 or 40 feet long, and plenty of servants, horses, dogs, and a library full of the rarest books. But how shall I describe his father? The most lovable, perfect old gentleman I ever met with. A sort of modern Dominie Sampson, and his manners are so high-bred and natural. Miss Disraeli is handsome and talented, and her brothers. Our political pet, the eldest, commonly called 'Dizzy,' you will see a great deal of; you know Wyndham brought him in for Maidstone with himself.

The next important event in Disraeli's life was his first speech in the House of Commons, and this was made on December 7, 1837. It was unquestionably a failure. The occasion was badly chosen; the carefully prepared speech contained elaborate phrases which might have been effective if completely heard by an attentive House, but which, when broken up by noisy interruptions, sounded strangely artificial; and a recent and very unfortunate controversy with O'Connell had made his followers, not without some justification, resolved to deny to the new member the customary courtesy of a quiet hearing.

The quarrel with O'Connell occurred nearly three years earlier, when Disraeli was fighting an election contest at Taunton. He made a speech in which he referred to O'Connell, and attacked the Whigs for leaguing themselves with one whom they had denounced as a traitor. The short report of this speech which appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* represented him as having said that O'Connell was 'an incendiary

and a traitor.' The word 'incendiary' had not been used by Disraeli in any part of his speech. A few days after this incorrect report appeared O'Connell made a speech at Dublin. He quoted these two words, and in the course of a long passage devoted to this personal question he denounced Disraeli as guilty of 'superlative blackguardism,' as 'an egregious liar both in action and in words,' as 'a vile creature,' a 'miscreant,' and a 'reptile,' and declared that he believed him to be the lineal descendant of the impenitent thief on the cross. Disraeli tried to provoke Morgan John O'Connell to take up his father's quarrel and meet him in a duel. Failing in this, he wrote and sent to the newspapers what he himself described later as 'a hot and hurried letter,' in which he called O'Connell a 'Yahoo,' spoke of his 'foul and insolent comments upon a hasty and garbled report of a speech,' and unfortunately added, 'I expect to be a representative of the people before the repeal of the Union. We shall meet at Philippi, and rest assured that, confident in a good cause, and in some energies which have been not altogether unproved, I will seize the first opportunity of inflicting upon you a castigation which will make you at the same time remember and repent the insults that you have lavished on Benjamin Disraeli.'

The question before the House on December 7 was one of Parliamentary privilege, a subject upon which a new member just elected would have little claim to be heard. But O'Connell spoke in the course of the debate. He made no reference to the entirely irrelevant matter of his quarrel with Disraeli. But the antagonists were now at Philippi, and Disraeli thought that he could not without discredit allow the opportunity of inflicting the castigation he had promised to pass unused. So when O'Connell's speech ended he rose at once, and was called on by the Speaker. His reception was not unfriendly, and for a short time he was fairly heard. But the followers of O'Connell were not inclined to listen patiently to an

attack on their leader to which he would be unable to reply, and soon a tumult began. The best account of what followed is found in a letter written the next day by a barrister who had obtained admission to the House, and, curiously enough, sat among the members, and almost immediately behind Disraeli. The letter was not published until seventy-five years later.

The next thing was young Disraeli's maiden speech. He began with all the confidence of a bully to claim indulgence for his first attempt. Then said a few words to O'Connell about his rambling speech. 'But I'll spare the honourable and learned gentleman's feelings.' (Laughter.) From this time he tried to do the orator so very much that roars of laughter ended a sentence begun amidst coughs and groans. Even his own party did not cheer him after a sentence or two. 'When the bell of our cathedral announced the death of a monarch'—'See the philosophic prejudice of man'—'Nothing is so easy as to laugh'—'Oh, give me but five minutes by the clock'—'I never attempted anything but I succeeded'—and lastly he hooted above the noise, 'Though you won't hear me now, the time will come when I will make you hear me.' So much for him.*

Disraeli was deeply mortified. He sat during the rest of the debate with head cast down and folded arms, and when his friend Chandos came to say some consoling words his only answer was one word, 'Failure.' But others had seen in some passages of the dislocated speech, and in the fine voice and the high courage of the speaker, the promise of future success, and he had much comfort from a conversation with Sheil, beyond question the finest orator in the House, to whom he was introduced by Bulwer.

Sheil said:

If you had been listened to, what would have been the result? You would have done what I did;

* Letter by the late Sir Rupert Kettle, *The Times*, November, 1912.

you would have made the best speech that you ever would have made; it would have been received frigidly, and you would have despaired of yourself. I did. As it is, you have shown the House that you have a fine organ, that you have an unlimited command of language, that you have courage, temper, and readiness. Now get rid of your genius for a session. Speak often, for you must not show yourself a coward, but speak shortly. Be very quiet, try to be dull, only argue and reason imperfectly, for if you reason with precision they will think you are trying to be witty. Astonish them by speaking on subjects of detail. Quote figures, dates, calculations. And in a short time the House will sigh for the wit and eloquence which they all know are in you; they will encourage you to pour them forth, and then you will have the ear of the House and be a favourite.

Disraeli acted at once and throughout his life on this admirable advice. Ten days later he made a speech, short, unpretentious, and practical, on a Copyright Bill, in which he suggested the insertion of a new clause. He was cheered from all parts of the House, and Talfourd, who proposed the Bill, said he 'would avail himself of the excellent suggestion of the honourable member for Maidstone, himself one of the greatest ornaments of our modern literature.' The failure of the maiden speech was indeed very quickly retrieved. He spoke three times during the session of 1838—once upon the Corn Laws, once on the Copyright Bill, and once on Irish questions. These speeches were all successful; but the chief interest of his life during this and the following year was domestic, and not political.

Disraeli's marriage has often been spoken of as being on his part an act of self-interest, and convenience, by which he obtained a comfortable London home, and the support of a considerable income, at the cost of marrying a woman much older than himself, and inferior to him in social and intellectual characteristics. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Every scrap of writing which he sent to Mrs. Wyndham Lewis from the day of his election for Maidstone to the day of her death thirty-five years later was lovingly preserved by her, and enough has been published to show that their marriage was on both sides a union of sincere and unselfish affection, and that their married life was one of complete and continuous happiness. During the first few months after the election the admiration which she felt and expressed for him, and the grateful regard which he felt towards her, were naturally tinged with an affection on her side and on his which deepened with the growing intimacy of their friendship. In March, 1838, her husband died quite suddenly. It was inevitable that their regard for each other should be permitted to develop into the devotion of an unselfish love which gave happiness to all the many years of their married life. The widow was resolved that until her full year of widowhood was ended there should be no engagement or any mention of its probability, but the treasured correspondence shows that there was soon a complete understanding between them, and when the year elapsed there was no secret of their intention to marry as soon as the session of 1839 should close. Six years earlier Disraeli had said in *Contarini Fleming*: 'Talk of fame and romance; all the glory and adventure in the world are not worth one single hour of domestic bliss.' Now on the eve of marriage he wrote: 'I look forward to the day of our union as that epoch in my life which will seal my career: for whatever occurs afterwards will, I am sure, never shake my soul, as I shall always have the refuge of your sweet heart in sorrow or disappointment, and your quick and accurate sense to guide me in prosperity and triumph.' Six years later he wrote the famous dedication of *Sybil*: 'I would inscribe this work to one whose noble spirit and gentle nature ever prompt her to sympathise with the suffering; to one whose sweet voice has often encouraged, and whose

taste and judgement have ever guided, its pages; the most severe of critics but—a perfect Wife.'

After her death he wrote in his answer to a letter of condolence from Gladstone: 'Marriage is the greatest earthly happiness when founded on complete sympathy. That hallowed lot was mine.' And in another letter he described her as 'one who for thirty-three years was the inseparable and ever interesting companion of my life.' 'There was,' he said, 'no care which she could not mitigate, and no difficulty which she could not face. She was the most cheerful and the most courageous woman I ever knew.'

And to her also their union was one of unstinted happiness. When she died, her bereaved husband found among her papers a touching letter written seventeen years before.

My own Dear Husband, *June 6th*, 1856.

If I should depart this life before you, leave orders that we may be buried in the same grave, at whatever distance you may die from England. And now God bless you, my kindest, dearest! You have been a perfect husband to me. Be put by my side in the same grave, and now, farewell, my dear Dizzy. Do not live alone, dearest. Someone I earnestly hope you may find as attached to you as your own devoted

Mary Anne.

And shortly before her death she told a woman friend that 'her life had been a long scene of happiness, owing to his love and kindness.'

CHAPTER VII

MEMBER FOR SHREWSBURY

On August 28, 1839, Disraeli was married to Mrs. Wyndham Lewis at St. George's, Hanover Square.

The newly married couple gave themselves nearly three months of foreign travel. Then they returned to London, gave a few dinner parties, were warmly welcomed by their many friends, and entered on that quiet and regular course of domestic life that was destined to continue so long and happily.

Disraeli at once addressed himself with his characteristic industry to the study of the political problems which were pressing urgently on the attention of Parliament. With the Irish question in its manifold and difficult forms he had long ago made himself familiar, and it was the subject of two of his most important speeches in 1839. But two other grave subjects of public policy demanded consideration. The condition of the labouring classes in England during the ten years from 1830 to 1840 was one of appalling poverty and suffering. Disraeli held and declared the opinion that a political party could only hope to retain power by securing for the people greater social felicity.

When in June, 1839, the great Chartist petition with a million and a half of signatures was presented to the House of Commons, he disturbed and puzzled his political friends by saying that he sympathised with the Chartists. He said this must be looked upon as a very remarkable social movement; that the Chartists formed a great body of his countrymen; and that no one could doubt that they had great grievances.

Now he began the close investigation into the condition of labour in the manufacturing districts, which resulted a few years later in the publication of *Sybil*.

The other question rapidly rising into great importance was the controversy between Protection and Free Trade. The Anti-Corn Law League had been founded in 1838; and a series of bad harvests, leading to the sufferings of the 'hungry forties,' diverted attention from the political proposals of the Chartists, and compelled Parliament to take up in earnest economic questions. Disraeli turned with alacrity to a diligent study of the statistics of trade and commerce in this and other countries. Following Sheil's advice, he spoke on subjects of detail, and quoted figures, dates, and calculations. And in two well-considered speeches in April and June of 1840 he showed his leaders and the House that a brilliant novelist and rhetorician could be at the same time a careful and competent exponent of finance.

To all appearance his future success was now assured. Sir Robert Peel admired and encouraged him, and gave one very remarkable proof of his friendship and confidence. In the early days of the session of 1840 he called a meeting of his chief supporters to confer with them upon the political situation. It was the first appearance of a 'shadow' Cabinet. Sixteen were invited. Disraeli was one of them. He was the only one of the party who had not held public office, and he must have understood the invitation as a promise that he should be a member of the next Conservative administration. It did not seem as if he would have long to wait. The Melbourne Ministry stumbled on through the year 1840, during which the marriage of the Queen had some effect in temporarily checking the violence of party conflict, but in May, 1841, when they had been six times defeated in the House of Commons, and had tamely submitted to the indignity, a vote of want of con-

fidence was proposed by Peel. It was only carried by a single vote, but it could not be disregarded, and Melbourne obtained the short respite of a dissolution of Parliament.

At this election Disraeli had to woo a fresh constituency. After the death of Mr. Wyndham Lewis the Maidstone Conservatives, deprived of the convenience of his well-filled purse, made claims on Disraeli which he was unwilling and unable to meet; and it was soon clear that he had no chance of re-election there. So he had made other arrangements.

The election for Shrewsbury began another and an important chapter in his political history, and the incidents of the contest deserve a full description.

The evening of June 14, 1841, was a time of great excitement in the good old town of Shrewsbury.

The dissolution of Parliament had been announced, and a General Election was in immediate prospect. The two members who had represented Shrewsbury in the late Parliament did not mean to come forward again. But Shrewsbury was not unprepared. Two Liberal candidates credited with considerable wealth, but having no other conspicuous qualification, were already in the field.

The Tory campaign had been well organised. An eminent expert in electoral corruption, one Isaac Flight, had been so busy and persuasive at Shrewsbury that he had induced more than seven hundred electors, a majority of the whole constituency, to sign a requisition to Mr. Tomline, Q.C., and Benjamin Disraeli begging them to come and give the electors of Shrewsbury the opportunity of supporting them at the poll. Neither of these two gentlemen had any connection with Shrewsbury, or had, ever before, been seen in the town. In the late Parliament Mr. Tomline had represented Sudbury in Suffolk; and Disraeli, Maidstone in Kent. The voters who signed the requisition did not go so far as actually to promise to vote for them. That, it was well known, would in

some cases depend on certain private negotiations, which would take place when the opposing candidates were actually in the town and had placed in the bank the funds that would be needed. The *Globe* had already stated that the Liberal candidates had paid £15,000 into the local bank, and this was encouraging.

Now on this June 14 the Tories were waiting the arrival of their champions. As the evening drew on a crowd gathered in the Market Square, and just at eight o'clock an open carriage drawn by four spanking greys, with postilions wearing blue and white favours, came dashing into the Square, and drew up at the Lion Inn, the Tory headquarters.

In it sat the two candidates: one, Mr. Tomline, a substantial-looking country gentleman; the other a strange and romantic figure. Benjamin Disraeli was a man of thirty-seven years of age; he had been four years in Parliament, had written romances and satires and political pamphlets, and had already made for himself a notable position in the House of Commons. But of all this the electors of Shrewsbury knew little. They saw before them a man somewhat over middle height, with strongly marked Jewish features, and a face of startling pallor framed in carefully arranged black curls. His dress was extravagant in fashion, and his fingers were loaded with rings.

In name and in appearance one would have thought him the least attractive candidate for an English country town, and some of those who had signed the requisition must have been a little shocked. But, of course, the new-comers were received with enthusiastic welcome. At half-past nine another four-horse carriage brought an important reinforcement in the person of Mrs. Disraeli.

She established herself at the Lion Inn, and there, or at their houses, interviewed doubtful voters, and in one way or another overcame their doubts. The contest lasted a fortnight. It was a noisy, disorderly

fight, with more of personalities than politics in the imperfectly heard speeches, and very nearly a duel between Disraeli and one violent assailant. A list was published of judgements entered against him between 1838 and 1841 amounting to £20,000. He declared in his speech that the charge that he was in debt was false, and he issued an address on June 25 in which he said: 'There is not a single shilling in the list of judgements published which has not been completely satisfied.'

On June 29 came the polling. The Tories were returned. There was a tumultuous procession; a carriage drawn by six greys, the postilions wearing light blue silk caps; and the Disraeli crest and motto now first appeared, the crest the castle of Castile, and the motto 'Forti nihil difficile' ('Nothing is difficult to a brave man') being emblazoned on a banner.

Disraeli made his speech from an iron balcony over a mercer's shop in the Market Square.

Fifty years later, on June 29, 1891, when the great statesman had been ten years dead, a great Jubilee celebration took place at Shrewsbury. There was a procession through the town, and ten or twelve old men were found who had voted for him half a century before. A banquet took place in an enormous tent which held several hundred people. In the tent a platform was erected, and the iron balcony was taken down from its place and built up on the platform, and the member of Lord Salisbury's Government who had been sent down to take part in the demonstration spoke from that balcony.

The elections both in the boroughs and counties went heavily against the Government, and a few weeks later an amendment to the Address to the Crown was carried by a majority of nine, and Lord Melbourne resigned. Sir Robert Peel became Prime Minister, and now occurred one of the great disappointments of Disraeli's life. He had a just expectation that he would receive office in the new administration. It

was true that, as member for Maidstone, he had not always followed Peel's lead. But their personal relations were friendly, and the position he had already obtained in the House of Commons clearly marked him out for the honour and responsibility of office. But no post was offered him, and in his mortification he wrote a strong but not undignified remonstrance to Sir Robert, which received a rather formal and stiff reply. Disraeli's exclusion from the Ministry was not the fault of the Prime Minister. He, indeed, wished to give him office. But Lord Stanley, under whom Disraeli thrice served in later years, had at this time, partly perhaps from dislike to his name and race, and partly because of a private difference which has never been fully explained, said that if 'that scoundrel' were included in the Ministry he himself would not join it. Lord Stanley was too powerful to be lost. Disraeli soon knew the real cause of his disappointment, and never complained in public, or in private conversation, or correspondence, that Peel had treated him badly.

He nearly suffered another disappointment which would have been much more serious. The contest at Shrewsbury had been, as already indicated, by no means free from the simple and elementary form of electoral corruption. And a petition was presented against the return of the Tory candidates. Disraeli knew that if it came to be considered by a Committee of the House of Commons their decision would probably unseat him; and for some months he was in serious anxiety. But the investigation of electoral offences was at that time a somewhat leisurely process, and it was not until nine months after his return that his suspense was ended. A similar petition had been presented against two Liberals who had been returned for Gloucester, and almost at the last moment his agent managed to make an arrangement by which both petitions were withdrawn. He had not, however, allowed this uneasiness to interfere with the laborious

study he was now giving to commercial questions, and in January, 1842, he was busily preparing an elaborate speech in support of a motion of which he gave notice at the beginning of the session for the reorganisation of the British Consular service. This speech was of great importance. It laid the foundation of that reputation for untiring industry, keen judgement, and statesman-like breadth of vision, which gave him for nearly forty years a powerful influence on the councils of Parliament, and the opinions of his fellow-countrymen. How careful he was in its preparation may be seen from a letter written to his wife, who was in the country while he was busy with Parliamentary duties in London, under date of February 21, 1842:

I went through my whole speech this morning without a reference to a single paper, so completely am I master of all its details. It took me three hours—an awful period; but I fear I cannot retrench it, at least materially. The details are so numerous, so varied, and so rich.

The speech was not delivered until three weeks later, and on March 9 he sent to his wife an interesting account of his feelings and his success.

The affair last night realised all my hopes; the success was complete and brilliant. I rose at five o'clock to one of the most disagreeable audiences that ever welcomed a speaker. Everybody seemed to affect not to be aware of my existence, and there was a general buzz and chatter. Nevertheless, not losing my head, I proceeded without hesitation for ten minutes, though when I recollected what I had to travel through, and the vast variety of detail which I had perspicuously to place before the House, I more than once despaired of accomplishing my purpose. In about ten minutes affairs began to mend; when a quarter of an hour had elapsed there was generally an attentive audience; and from that time until near half-past seven, when I sat down, having been up about two hours and twenty minutes, I can say

without the smallest exaggeration that not only you might have heard a pin fall in the House, but there was not an individual, without a single exception, who did not listen to every sentence with the most marked interest, and even excitement.

If the opening speech was remarkable for its solidity and completeness, the reply which closed the debate was no less indicative of the power which Disraeli was thereafter to wield in the House of Commons. Lord Palmerston, who had been Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the late Government, opposed the motion, and in the course of his speech expressed a sarcastic hope that Disraeli might soon obtain office, referring, as was well understood, to his disappointment at not being included in Peel's Ministry.

Disraeli's reply was the earliest example of the rapier-like retort which was never wanting when he was attacked.

I must, in the first place, return my thanks to the noble Lord for his warm aspirations for my political preferment. Coming from such a quarter, I consider them auspicious. The noble Viscount is a consummate master of the subject, and if to assist my advancement he will only impart to me the secret of his own unprecedented rise, and by what means he has contrived to enjoy power under seven successive administrations, I shall at least have gained a valuable result from this discussion.

In this session of 1842 Disraeli made two other important speeches, one upon Indian finance, and the other upon the commercial policy of the Tory party. In the first he made a vigorous attack on the late Government for its mismanagement of foreign affairs; and in the second he declared that Sir Robert Peel was carrying out the policy which Pitt had expounded in 1787, which had become the traditional policy of the Tories. During this session he was a steady supporter of the Prime Minister. Their personal relations

were quite friendly, and when just before the session closed an important debate was in progress and Sir Robert, after speaking, had left the House, the Government Whip asked Disraeli to be prepared to follow any leading member of the Opposition who might intervene in the discussion. In the early days of the session of 1843 he gave valuable help to the Government in the recurrent debates on their commercial policy. He believed that Peel might be trusted to remain faithful to Protectionist principles.

There was already much uneasiness in the Tory camp, for the Prime Minister's language had become somewhat vague, and there were rumours of his intention to make proposals for reducing to a nominal amount the duty upon wheat imported from Canada, and this would undoubtedly involve a large increase of indirect importation from the United States. Disraeli was resolved that there should be no misunderstanding as to his opinions, and his resolves as to future action, and on May 9, 1843, he delivered a notable speech to a large meeting of his constituents. He protested against the attacks which were being made at Shrewsbury and elsewhere upon Sir Robert Peel, and declared that nothing had yet been done by him which would justify the withdrawal of their support. But he made quite clear the conditions of his own loyalty to his leader. He said:

You should not part with him for what he has done; neither should you part with him because you think he will do a certain act, which I believe that he will not. If I find the Government seceding really from their pledges and opinions,—if I find them, for instance, throwing over that landed interest that brought them into power,—my vote will be recorded against them. I do not come down to Shrewsbury to make a holiday speech and say this. I have said this at Westminster, sitting at the back of Sir Robert Peel, alone and without flinching, and I say it again here.

He soon showed that he was prepared to act up to his declaration. When he returned to town, the Canadian Corn Bill came up for a second reading, and he voted against the Government. It was the first step in a memorable contest.

CHAPTER VIII

'CONINGSBY' AND 'SYBIL'

The improvement of Disraeli's position in the House of Commons was not the only important result of his speech on Consular relations. There was in that House a group of young men who had been friends at Eton and Cambridge, and now desired to act together in political life. They were George Smythe (afterwards Viscount Strangford), Lord John Manners, the second son of the Duke of Rutland, and Alexander Baillie Cochrane, a young Scottish laird. Smythe and Manners were twenty-four years of age; Cochrane two years older. They had been gradually losing confidence in Peel, and were much attracted by Disraeli's historical vindication of Tory principles, and his outspoken sympathy with the hard lot of the industrial population. His speech on March 8 seemed to mark him out as the leader of a new party, and they came at once to him with proposals which he did not discourage.

The project, however, came to nothing, and during the rest of the session of 1842, and in that of the following year, the three young men, who were known as the Young England party, voted together, and supported each other in debate, but did not attract Parliamentary allies. But the pleasant personal relations between them and Disraeli grew steadily closer, and in the autumn of 1843 there was a notable gathering at Henry Hope's beautiful country home at Deepdene. There Disraeli and his wife spent the whole of the month of September, and the Young England group and their special friends were brought together to meet him. Twenty-seven years later

Disraeli wrote a General Preface to a collected edition of his novels which is a very interesting and valuable chapter of autobiography, and he there describes the origin and character of the three books which were the outcome of this gathering.

It was at the Deepdene that Henry Hope first urged the expediency of my treating in a literary form those views and subjects which were the matter of our frequent conversation.

This was the origin of *Coningsby* or *The New Generation*, which I commenced under his roof, and which I inscribed to his name. The derivation and character of political parties, the condition of the people which had been the consequence of them, the duties of the Church as a main remedial agency in our present state, were the three principal topics which I intended to treat, but I found they were too vast for the space I had allotted to myself. These were all launched in *Coningsby*, but the origin and condition of political parties, the first portion of the theme, was the only one completely handled in that work.

The work begun at Deepdene was continued during the following months at Bradenham, where Disraeli used the writing-room which he had habitually occupied before his marriage. He found that he had undertaken a very heavy task. The construction of a story which should command the reader's interest by the vivacity of its record of the varying fortunes of the early career of a young politician, and should at the same time be a study of the origin and condition of political parties, was by no means easy. But this was not all that Disraeli resolved to do. He determined to introduce a character who should represent the highest form of the intellectual and moral characteristics of the Jewish race.

Sidonia, at his first appearance in the story, is described in a daring passage. 'On all subjects his mind seemed to be instructed and his opinions formed. He flung out a result in a few words; he solved with

a phrase some deep problem that men muse over for years. He said many things that were strange, yet they undoubtedly appeared to be true. Then, without the slightest air of pretension or parade, he seemed to know everybody as well as everything.'

The supreme merit of this part of the book is that the conversation of Sidonia justifies the description. Sidonia was Disraeli himself. Of the other characters in the novel, twenty were at once identified as sketches, in all cases but one good-humoured and inoffensive, of persons well known in London society. The one exception was Nicholas Rigby, a very severe and unfriendly portrait of J. W. Croker, who had offended Disraeli past forgiveness by his mischievous interference with the arrangements for the publication of the *Representative*.

For four months Disraeli worked diligently at Bradenham, and after some years of abstinence from regular literary work he found his task very trying. At the end of November he wrote to Lord John Manners: 'The sustained labour is very painful, and I am daily more convinced that there is no toil like literature. However, once in, etc. It is too late to moralise. I want to clear the deck, if I can, by the end of January, for action and speculation will never blend.'

His wish was fulfilled, and when he came to London at the end of January for the opening of Parliament he brought with him the completed manuscript. Colburn agreed to publish it on the terms of sharing the profit equally with the author, and early in May the book appeared. Its success was immediate and permanent. The first edition of 1,000 copies sold in a fortnight, and by the middle of June a second edition was nearly gone, and a third was preparing.

For these three editions Disraeli's share of the profit was £1,000. Another large edition followed, and in 1849, when the work in its three-volume form had been long out of print, a cheap edition in a

single volume was issued, and had a very large circulation.

It is not surprising that Disraeli should have found the task of writing this book a very laborious one. It contains about 180,000 words. It was written by his own hand in little more than four months—an extraordinary feat when we consider the thought and care required in writing a story of contemporary politics, and weaving into it the life-like portraits of persons well known in political and social life, and in setting behind them as a background the learned and thoughtful discourses of Sidonia. But arduous and fatiguing as the task had been, Disraeli gave himself no rest. Of the three great topics on which he had at Deepdene resolved to write, the second, the condition of the people, was to his mind by far the most important. In his address to the electors of High Wycombe in October, 1832, he declared that he would withhold his support from any Ministry which would not originate some great measure to ameliorate the condition of the labouring classes. In 1839 he astonished and offended the Tory members among whom he sat by avowing his sympathy with Chartism as 'a great social movement.' At Shrewsbury in 1843 he said, 'Let me tell those gentlemen who are so fond of telling us that property has its duties as well as its rights, that labour also has its rights as well as its duties,' and he spoke of the evidence there was before Parliament of 'a state of demoralisation in the once happy population of this land which is not equalled in the most barbarous countries.'

At this time the condition of the industrial population, agricultural as well as manufacturing, was deplorable. The hours of labour were cruelly long; children of seven or eight years of age were working many hours a day in the darkness and danger of the mine, or amid the clanging of the factory. Food was so dear that the men and women who were able to

find employment at the miserable wages which the competition of starving crowds compelled them to accept were badly clothed and insufficiently fed, while a multitude of not less than one-seventh of the adult population could get no work at all, and every winter saw the hated workhouses crowded to the doors. The Reports of the Commissions of 1843 and 1844 gave abundant material from which Disraeli could have constructed a terrible show of the sufferings and ill-usage of the poor in the 'hungry forties.' But he was not content with newspaper information and Commission Reports. In 1843, and again in the autumn of 1844, he paid visits to friends in the North of England, and examined with great care and minuteness the conditions of labour in the large manufacturing towns. And through a friend he obtained for perusal the whole of the correspondence between Feargus O'Connor, the recognised leader of the Chartist movement, and his chief assistants in the work of organisation, and he determined to make the second volume of the triple task which had been resolved on at Deepdene 'an accurate and never exaggerated picture of a remarkable period in our domestic history, and of a popular organisation which, in its extent and completeness, has perhaps never been equalled.' To this work he gave four months of unceasing industry. It was finished on the last day of April, 1845, and on the following day he wrote to his sister: 'I have never been through such a four months. What with the House of Commons, which was itself quite enough for a man, and writing six hundred pages, I thought sometimes my mind must turn.'

The publication of *Sybil* was an event of much importance. Its immediate result was to establish beyond doubt or cavil the position of its author in the worlds of literature and politics. The strength of imagination, and the masterly power of expression, which produced so brilliant a picture of the hard condition of the people,

and of the ignorance and selfishness and party spirit which were hindering its improvement, were accompanied by a wise and well-instructed statesmanship which had the social happiness of the millions for its first object.' But the book had a larger result than this. It was the first time that a great writer of fiction had used his power to set forward a movement for the cure of the mischiefs he described. The remedy was not to be found in trivial extensions of political privilege, but in changed relations between class and class, and a recognition that the possession of rank and wealth involved the responsibility of securing, as far as laws, or personal effort and self-sacrifice, could secure it, the well-being of those by whose labour the wealth was created. It was the first and the finest of novels with a purpose. It was followed some years later by others. Charles Dickens in *Hard Times*, Charles Kingsley in *Yeast* and *Alton Locke*, Charles Reade in *It's Never Too Late to Mend*, and Mrs. Gaskell in *Ruth*, and Mrs. Browning in her poem of 'The Cry of the Children,' helped the good cause to which Lord Shaftesbury devoted his political life, with Disraeli as his steadfast supporter. From the publisher's point of view *Sybil* was a great success. Three large editions were speedily sold, and were from time to time followed by reprints. *Coningsby* and *Sybil* are still living books, interesting the student of politics, and the social philanthropist, and from the day of their publication they have profoundly affected the literature of their country.

CHAPTER IX

THE ATTACK ON PEEL

In the letter to Lord John Manners written at the end of November, 1843, when Disraeli was hard at work on *Coningsby*, he expressed the hope that the book would be finished by the end of January. This was achieved, and the author came to London to attend to his Parliamentary duties. He found, to his surprise, that the reminder usually sent by the Prime Minister to his supporters inviting their attendance at the House had not been sent to him. He was not disposed to submit to a formal dismissal from the Tory party, and wrote to Peel protesting against this as a 'painful personal procedure which the past by no means authorised.' He at the same time complained of Peel's want of courtesy to him in debate, which he said 'had long been a subject of notice on both sides of the House.' The tone of Peel's reply was naturally not very cordial. He recalled occasions on which Disraeli had expressed an unfavourable opinion on the conduct of the Government, but trusted that it was an unnecessary scruple which had led him to withhold the usual invitation.

As to Disraeli's charge of want of courtesy, he said he was unconscious of having so treated him, but if he did the act was wholly unconscious on his part.

This was not a very promising opening of the session, and before it closed the somewhat strained relations between the two men had changed into keen antagonism. The fact was that their characters were essentially opposite. Sir Robert Peel was a practical politician, well informed and well intentioned, anxious to secure the welfare of the people so far as the doing

so would be helpful to his own position as the leader of a Parliamentary majority and the occupant of the chief post in the Government. He honestly believed that his dominance in the councils of the state was so great an advantage to the country that small questions of personal consistency, of loyalty to the principles he had declared, and good faith to the followers his promises had enlisted, could well be neglected when that dominance was threatened. Disraeli was one of the first to see that the same instability of principle which Peel had shown fifteen years earlier in his behaviour, after the death of Canning, on the question of Roman Catholic disabilities, was about to be illustrated in the matter of Free Trade.

At Shrewsbury in May, 1843, he had told his constituents that his support of Peel was conditional upon the fidelity of the Prime Minister to the principles whose avowal had procured for him a great Parliamentary majority.

The first important debate in the session of 1844 was one which lasted nine nights upon a motion of censure upon the Government for their mismanagement of Irish affairs.

In the course of that debate Disraeli delivered one of the most remarkable speeches of his whole career. Peel himself said of it that it was ' a speech not the less to be admired because it departed from the ordinary routine of Parliamentary eloquence, and touched on more comprehensive and general views.' At a later time Gladstone said of it that ' a more closely woven tissue of argument and observation had seldom been heard in the debates of this House.'

Disraeli voted with the Government against the vote of censure; but his speech contained one sentence which reminded his hearers of the doubt now disturbing the minds of the Tory party whether their leaders would firmly resist the agitation of the Anti-Corn Law League. He said: 'All the right hon.

Baronet will have to do will be what public men do not seem to think they have the power of doing—to create public opinion instead of following it; to lead the public instead of always lagging after and following others.'

Disraeli did not attend the House very regularly at this time; he was busy with the final revision of *Coningsby*, and the correction of proofs for the press. But in June, greatly strengthened in his Parliamentary position by the splendid success of the novel, he made a vigorous attack on the Prime Minister. The occasion was curious and full of interest. In May a Government Bill for limiting the hours of labour in factories of ' young persons '—boys from thirteen to eighteen years of age, and girls up to twenty-one—was before the House of Commons. This Bill proposed the limit of twelve hours a day of actual labour; the hours of employment to be thirteen and a half, an hour and a half being allowed for meals and rest.

In committee Ashley (afterwards Lord Shaftesbury) twice succeeded in defeating this proposal, but failed to carry an amendment limiting to ten the hours of actual labour. Rather than accept any compromise the Government withdrew the Bill, and introduced another, again containing the twelve hours' limitation, and Graham and Peel declared that unless the House accepted this they would retire from office.

Upon this question Cobden and Bright were supporters of the Government. Bright had in debate made a violent onslaught upon Ashley, and Cobden wrote to a relative speaking of ' the Socialist doctrines of the fools behind Graham and Peel.' In the same letter he said: ' The trickery of the Government was kept up till the time of Ashley's motion, in the confident expectation that he would be defeated by the Whigs and Free Traders. They were counting upon this support, and so they gave liberty to Wortley and others of their party to vote against the Cabinet in order to get favour at the hustings. The Whigs

very basely turned round upon their former opinions to spite the Tories.' But as the Queen said in her letter to the King of the Belgians the day after the final division, the Government, if they asked for a vote of confidence, would have a majority of 100; the threat of resignation was decisive, and the majority of twenty by which Ashley's amendment had been carried was converted to a majority of the same number for its recision.

The Bill became law, and contained the limitation to twelve hours.

Disraeli was throughout his life a steadfast supporter of the doctrines of which Cobden spoke so contemptuously, and in a quite unpremeditated speech in the final debate he used language which in later times must often have recurred to Peel's memory.

> The right hon. gentleman [he said] came into power upon the strength of our votes, but he relies for the permanence of his Ministry upon his political opponents. He may be right—he may even be to a certain degree successful in pursuing the line of conduct which he has adopted, menacing to his friends and cringing to his opponents—but I for one am disposed to believe that in this case his success will neither tend to the honour of this House nor to his own credit. . . . It only remains for me to declare, after the mysterious hint which fell from the right hon. Baronet in the course of his speech, that if I, in common with other members, am called upon to appear again upon the hustings, I shall at least not be ashamed to do so, nor shall I feel that I have weakened my claim upon the confidence of my constituents by not changing my vote within forty-eight hours at the menace of a Minister.

When Disraeli sat down, the enthusiasm of the long-continued cheering made it appear certain that Ministers would be defeated, but Stanley, by a brilliant appeal to the Tory waverers, saved the Government, and earned his almost immediate promotion to the House of Lords.

So ended the session of 1844. Disraeli had only made three speeches in Parliament, but the publication of *Coningsby* in May, and the denunciation of Peel in June, had given him the fame which is power. He felt that his position had changed. He went to Shrewsbury to hold two successful meetings, and thence he wrote to his wife: 'The feeling of the people is genuine, and may be depended on. They seem all of them quite to appreciate my start this year both literary and political.'

The successes literary and political of 1844 were brilliantly followed up in 1845. *Sybil* was more important than *Coningsby*. In the House of Commons Disraeli's position was securely established. The speech just quoted was his first definite advance towards political leadership. It marked a change in his relations with Peel. He could no longer be counted as one of his followers. After his declaration that he was ready to maintain on the hustings his antagonism to the Minister whose menace he had defied, it was clear that there could be no reconciliation. The combatants were not unequally matched. Peel had large experience, great dignity of manner, and the command of a large and hitherto docile majority, but he was not a powerful debater. Disraeli stood alone. He had at this time no followers, nor did he make any attempt to find associates in his revolt, but his supremacy in debate had now been recognised; his historical knowledge and his familiarity with financial and economic questions and his untiring industry made him a formidable opponent. To the command of a lucid and picturesque rhetoric he added an unrivalled skill in sarcasm and invective against which Peel could make little defence.

The session of 1845 had only lasted a few weeks when a debate of no great importance upon the opening of letters in the Post Office gave Disraeli his first opportunity for a personal attack on the Prime Minister. The four speeches which he made in this

session of 1845 demand some fulness of quotation, not only because they seriously weakened Peel's prestige, and his authority over the members of his party, but because of their literary quality. The debater's skill in detecting and exposing the vulnerable points in his opponent's armour is equalled by the aptness of illustration, and the precision of phrase, which gave to the quietly delivered sarcasms their deadly effect.

In the Post Office debate Peel had spoken somewhat angrily of the attack which had been made on the Home Secretary, and Disraeli said:

The right hon. gentleman will pardon me for observing it, but he displayed an unusual warmth. I am aware that it by no means follows that the right hon. gentleman felt it. The right hon. Baronet is too great a mind and fills too eminent a position ever to lose his temper, but in a popular assembly it is sometimes expedient to enact the part of the choleric gentleman. The right hon. gentleman touched the red box with emotion. I know from old experience that when one first enters the House these exhibitions are rather alarming, and I believe that some of the younger members were much frightened, but I advise them not to be terrified. I told them that the right hon. Baronet would not eat them up, would not even resign; the very worst thing he would do would be to tell them to rescind a vote.

The sally was received with loud cheering and shouts of laughter. Disraeli closed his speech by saying that the motion before the House was not one of want of confidence in the Government, and he therefore hoped that he might, without offence, give an independent vote. The motion, he said, was not brought forward in a hostile spirit, and, as far as he was concerned, was not supported in a hostile spirit.

Peel was very angry, and on the following evening he thus retorted on his assailant:

It is certainly very possible to manifest great vehemence of action, and yet not to be in a great

passion. On the other hand, it is possible to be exceedingly cold, indifferent and composed in your manner, and yet to cherish very acrimonious feelings. Notwithstanding the provocation of the hon. gentleman, I will not deal so harshly with him as he has dealt with me. He undertakes to assure the House that my vehemence was all pretended and wrath all simulated. I, on the contrary, will do him entire justice; I do believe that his bitterness was not simulated, but was entirely sincere. The hon. gentleman has a perfect right to support a hostile motion . . . but let him not say that he does it in a friendly spirit.

> " Give me the avowed, the erect, the manly foe;
> Bold I can meet, perhaps may turn, the blow;
> But of all plagues, good Heaven, Thy wrath can send,
> Save, save, O save me from the candid friend !"

The quotation was very unfortunate, for Peel, who in 1827 had been so strong an opponent of Roman Catholic emancipation that he refused to serve in Canning's Ministry because that was to be considered an open question, and two years later, when Canning had died, broken down by labours and anxieties which this refusal had intensified, was a member of the Government which passed that measure, to quote a verse written by Canning about ' candid friends ' was to deliver himself into Disraeli's hands.

The punishment came swiftly. A week later, in another debate upon the opening of letters, Disraeli delivered a speech which is the classic and unsurpassed example of political invective. It was spoken, as he always spoke, without any use of notes, but its perfect finish must have been the fruit of very careful preparation. That day *Sybil* must have been neglected.

He [Peel] should not forget that a great number of his supporters were elected on the hustings under very different circumstances to those under which they sit here. Really a little philosophic consideration from so great a statesman under such circum-

stances is the least we might expect. I admit that I, for one, was sent here by my constituents to sit on this side. He may object to me, although I think he has no great reason to object, that I am sometimes in a different lobby to himself; but I was sent to swell a Tory majority, to support a Tory Ministry. Whether a Tory Ministry exists or not I do not pretend to decide; but I am bound to believe that the Tory majority still remains, and therefore I do not think that it is the majority that should cross the House, but only the Ministry. I hope that the hon. gentleman, on reflection, will take a more condescending and charitable view of our conduct than he has hitherto been pleased to do. I am sure myself I never misinterpret the conduct of the right hon. gentleman. I know there are some who think that he is looking out for new allies. I never believed anything of the kind. The position of the right hon. gentleman is clear and precise. I don't believe he is looking for any coalition, although many of my constituents do. The right hon. gentleman has only to remain exactly where he is. The right hon. gentleman caught the Whigs bathing, and walked away with their clothes. He has left them in the full enjoyment of their liberal position, and he is himself a strict conservative of their garments. I cannot conceive that the right hon. gentleman will ever desert his party; they seem never to desert him. There never was a man yet who had less need to find new friends. I therefore hope all these rumours will cease. I look on the right hon. gentleman as a man who has tamed the shrew of Liberalism by her own tactics. He is the political Petruchio, who has outbid you all.

If we could only induce the right hon. gentleman, therefore, to take a larger and more liberal view of his Parliamentary position than he seems to adopt in moments too testy for so great a man to indulge in, he would spare us some imputations which I assure him are really painful. If the right hon. gentleman may find it sometimes convenient to reprove a supporter on his right flank, perhaps we deserve it. I for one am quite prepared to bow to the rod; but really, if the right hon. gentleman, instead of having recourse to obloquy, would only stick to quotation, he may rely on it it would be a

safer weapon. It is one he always wields with the hand of a master, and when he does appeal to any authority, in prose or verse, he is sure to be successful, partly because he never quotes a passage that has not previously received the meed of Parliamentary approbation, and partly, and principally, because his quotations are so happy.

The right hon. gentleman knows what the introduction of a great name does in debate—how important is its effect, and occasionally how electrical. He never refers to any author who is not great, and sometimes who is not loved—Canning, for example. That is a name never to be mentioned, I am sure, in the House of Commons without emotion. We all admire his genius. We all, at least most of us, deplore his untimely end; and we all sympathise with him in his fierce struggle with supreme prejudice and sublime mediocrity, with inveterate foes and with candid friends. The right hon. gentleman may be sure that a quotation from such an authority will always tell. Some lines, for example, on friendship, written by Mr. Canning, and quoted by the right hon. gentleman! The theme, the poet, the speaker—what a felicitous combination! Its effect in debate must be overwhelming; and I am sure, if it were addressed to me, all that would remain would be for me thus publicly to congratulate the right hon. gentleman, not only on his ready memory, but on his courageous conscience.

It was not surprising that the cheers and laughter which had punctuated every passage of this speech were united at its close into a thunderous storm of cheering which for a time prevented Sir James Graham from beginning his speech in answer. And the effect in the country reflected the excitement in the House. Three weeks later Disraeli renewed his attack in a speech which was even more damaging to the Government, as it dealt directly with the great question which was now disturbing the loyalty of the Tories to their leader. A motion was brought forward by a county member calling on the Government to have regard in their financial methods to the necessity of affording relief to the agricultural interest.

The Government resisted the motion; Disraeli supported it, and in a speech full of the argument that persuades, and of the phrases which cannot be forgotten, made a formal indictment of the Ministry. The closing passage deserves the fame of frequent quotation which it has since received.

There is no doubt a difference in the right hon. gentleman's demeanour as leader of the Opposition and as Minister of the Crown. But that's the old story; you must not contrast too strongly the hours of courtship with the years of possession. 'Tis very true that the right hon. gentleman's conduct is different. I remember him making his Protection speeches. They were the best speeches I ever heard. It was a great thing to hear the right hon. gentleman say: 'I would rather be the leader of the gentlemen of England than possess the confidence of Sovereigns.' That was a grand thing. We don't hear much of 'the gentlemen of England' now. But what of that? They have the pleasures of memory, the charms of reminiscence. They were his first love, and, though he may not kneel to them now as in the hour of passion, still they can recall the past, and nothing is more useless or unwise than these scenes of crimination and reproach, for we know that in all these cases, when the beloved object has ceased to charm, it is in vain to appeal to the feelings. You know that is true. Every man almost has gone through it. My hon. friends reproach the right hon. gentleman. The right hon. gentleman does what he can to keep them quiet; he sometimes takes refuge in arrogant silence, and sometimes he treats them with haughty frigidity; and if they knew anything of human nature they would take the hint and shut their mouths. But they won't. And what then happens? The right hon. gentleman, being compelled to interfere, sends down his valet, who says in the genteelest manner: 'We can have no whining here.'* And that, sir, is exactly the case of

* This referred to Sidney Herbert, then Secretary for War, who in a previous debate had spoken of the Agriculturalists as 'coming whining to Parliament at every period of temporary distress.'

the great agricultural interest—that beauty which everybody wooed and one deluded. There is a fatality in such charms, and we now seem to approach the catastrophe of her career. Protection appears to be in about the same condition that Protestantism was in in 1828. The country will draw its moral. For my part, if we are to have Free Trade, I, who honour genius, prefer that such measures should be proposed by the hon. member for Stockport [Mr. Cobden] than by one who through skilful Parliamentary manœuvres has tampered with the generous confidence of a great people and a great party. For myself, I care not what may be the result. Dissolve, if you please, the Parliament you have betrayed, and appeal to the people, who, I believe, mistrust you. For me there remains this at least—the opportunity of expressing thus publicly my belief that a Conservative Government is an organised hypocrisy.

Again there was a scene of tumultuous enthusiasm. A writer in the *Weekly Chronicle* of that date said: 'No report can give an idea of the effect produced in the House of Commons. The manner of the delivery, the perfect intonation of the voice, the peculiar looks of the speaker—all contributed to a success that we believe to be perfectly unparalleled. No man within our recollection has wielded a similar power over the sympathies and passions of his hearers.' Disraeli might well say in the letter already quoted that the work of the House of Commons was enough for one man; the marvel is that these speeches could be made while the regular work of his industrious days was the writing of a long novel of great scope and purpose which would have engrossed the mental energy of any ordinary author.

A month later he made a further step forward. He had reproached and ridiculed Sir Robert Peel, he had denounced the Conservative Government as an organised hypocrisy, now he went on to exhort the House to restore true Parliamentary government by

putting an end to a dangerous system of Ministerial management. The debate was on the subject of the Maynooth grant, but Disraeli, having dealt with that topic, turned to matters of more vital importance.

If [said he] you are to have a popular Government, if you are to have a Parliamentary administration, the conditions antecedent are, that you should have a Government which declares the principles on which its policy is founded, and then you can have on them the wholesome check of a constitutional Opposition. What have we got instead? Something has risen up in this country as fatal in the political world as it has been in the landed world of Ireland—we have a great Parliamentary middleman. It is well known what a middleman is; he is a man who bamboozles one party and plunders the other, till, having obtained a position to which he is not entitled, he cries out: 'Let us have no party questions, but fixity of tenure.' I want to have a commission issued to inquire into the tenure by which Downing Street is held. I want to know whether the conditions of entry have been complied with, and whether there are not some covenants in the lease by which it is already forfeited. . . . Whatever may be the various motives and impulses which animate different sections of opinion, there is at least one common ground for co-operation, there is one animating principle which is likely to inspire us all. Let us in this House re-echo that which I believe to be the sovereign sentiment of this country; let us tell the people in high places that cunning is not caution, and that habitual perfidy is not high policy of state. On that ground we may all join. Let us bring back to this House that which it has for so long a time been without—the legitimate influence and salutary check of a constitutional Opposition. That is what the country requires, what the country looks for. Let us do it at once in the only way in which it can be done—by dethroning this dynasty of deception, by putting an end to the intolerable yoke of official despotism and Parliamentary imposture.

This was Disraeli's last speech in the session of 1845.

A few days after it was delivered he wrote to a friend about a visit to Berlin which he intended to make as soon as Parliament rose; and on the whole well satisfied with the great success of *Sybil*, he set off with his wife for a long stay on the Continent. They did not go to Germany. They travelled without any attendance; and after a rough crossing from Dover to Boulogne, they hired a carriage and drove to St. Omer, and there they heard that the neighbouring little township of Cassel was a place of beauty and seclusion. This was exactly what Disraeli needed. The double effort in literature and politics had tired him severely; he wanted rest, and he had resolved that this autumn should be given to the production, or at least to the construction and commencement, of the last of the three books which had been planned at Deepdene.

CHAPTER X

MINISTERIAL TROUBLES

Political affairs in England had become uninteresting. Disraeli had no follower or supporter. His speeches had weakened the personal authority of Peel, but his commanding majority remained undisturbed. The Young England party had disappeared; Manners and Smythe had gone back to their party allegiance. It looked as if, so Disraeli said, the Peel Ministry would be a Walpolian Government and last for twenty years.

Two years later, in his *Life of Lord George Bentinck*, he described the condition of political parties at the time he left England:

> The Minister had closed the session of 1845 with an overwhelming majority in both Houses. . . . The Conservative Government was far stronger than even at the commencement of the session of 1842. . . . Low prices, abundant harvests, and a thriving commerce had nearly reduced to silence the members of the Anti-Corn Law League; they lost at the same time elections and the ear of the House. . . . The condition of the Whig party itself was absolutely forlorn; it was spoken of as a corpse; it was treated as a phantom; their numbers scarcely exceeded one-sixth of the House in a Parliament of their own summoning.

The Disraelis found Cassel just what had been described. It was Flemish in all respects; few of the inhabitants and none of the humbler classes talked French. There was no library, bookseller's shop, or newspaper of any kind; they never heard of *Galignani*. Here they took a pleasant house on high ground, with a pretty garden, and a most charming view of landscape and distant sea, and here they spent three

months of restful enjoyment. They went to bed quite early, and Disraeli rose at half-past five in the morning, wrote very regularly, and made good progress with *Tancred*. For this he needed no library. The first third of the book is given to brilliant sketches of social life in England, with very scanty reference to political questions, and then the scene changes to Palestine and Arabia, and the author found ample material in his notes and recollections of his travel sixteen years before. At the end of November the travellers went to Paris, and there Disraeli, 'after living for three months in profound solitude in a Flemish wilderness, really having never conversed with a single being, or even read a journal,' found himself 'in a political atmosphere of fever heat.' The King (Louis Philippe) sent for him the day after his arrival in Paris, and from that moment he 'conversed with none but Ministers and Ambassadors of all parties and all countries, and all equally distracted.' For during his absence at Cassel important events had been happening in England which must here be briefly recorded.

In the autumn of 1845 there was an almost entire failure of the potato crop in Ireland, and in October the public mind in Great Britain was deeply moved by the terrible accounts which came to England of the sufferings, and in some places the actual starvation, of the Irish people. Peel at once made up his mind, though it is difficult to follow the logical process by which he reached his conclusion, that the only remedy was the total and absolute repeal for ever of all duties on all articles of subsistence. He called the Ministers together on October 31, and proposed to his colleagues that an Order in Council should be issued at once opening the ports to all foreign grain without any restriction, and Parliament be called together to sanction the Order. The Cabinet met four times in one week. If the opening of the ports was to be looked upon as a temporary measure to deal with an

urgent and exceptional need the proposal would have been accepted, although Lord Stanley pointed out that its effect would be to injure and not to help the suffering farmers of Ireland. But Peel made it clear that the Order in Council was intended by him to be the first step in the modification, and perhaps the entire repeal, of the Corn Laws.

On November 6 the Cabinet separated without coming to a decision, the Prime Minister having found only three supporters. The wishes and intentions of the Prime Minister soon became widely known, and Lord John Russell, as the leader of the Whig party, found himself in a difficult position.

Hitherto the Whigs had refused to support Cobden's motions for total repeal, or to go further than the adoption of a moderate fixed duty as against the Tory policy of a sliding scale. Now it appeared possible that Peel might succeed in persuading a reluctant Cabinet to accept, and a docile majority to submit to, a measure of total repeal, and might thereby still further strengthen his Parliamentary domination.

This was intolerable, and Russell determined to lead the movement which he saw he would be powerless to resist. So he wrote a letter to his constituents in the city of London announcing that he was a convert to the policy of immediate and total repeal, and saying that, as the Prime Minister seemed only to be waiting for an excuse for himself proposing this measure, there should be a widespread and vigorous expression of public opinion in its favour.

This ' Edinburgh ' letter was written on November 22, but it did not appear in *The Times* until the 27th. It came to the Cabinet in the midst of their deliberations (a meeting took place on the 25th), and had a decisive influence on the Prime Minister. Peel told the Queen and Prince Albert at a later date:

As soon as I saw Lord John's letter I felt that the ground was slipping away from under me, and that whatever I might now propose would appear as

dictated by the Opposition, as taking Lord John's measure. On November 1 the whole country was prepared for the thing; there had been no agitation, everybody looking to the Government; as soon as they saw this wavering and hesitating the country decided for itself, and Lord John has the merit, owing to his most dexterous move and our want of unanimity.*

Then came a meeting of the Cabinet at which the Duke of Wellington, who had hitherto stoutly resisted any proposals of repeal, said he had changed his mind. This carried others over, and Lord Stanley stood alone in inflexible opposition.

On December 4 an announcement, authentic but unauthorised, appeared in *The Times* that the Government had decided to call Parliament together in the first week of January, and then to propose the repeal of the taxes on corn. The Cabinet met that day. Stanley was firm, and the Duke of Buccleuch was of the same mind. Two days' delay for consideration made no change, and Sir Robert went to Osborne on the 6th and told the Queen that he could no longer continue in office. Lord John Russell was at once asked to form a new Government, and after some days of consultation with his friends he wrote to the Queen on December 18 undertaking to do so. Two days later he was obliged to abandon the task. He had proposed that Lord Palmerston should be Colonial Secretary and Lord Grey Home Secretary. Mr. Baring had agreed to be Chancellor of the Exchequer. At the last moment Lord Palmerston refused to take any office but that of Foreign Secretary, and Lord Grey refused to enter the Government, as he considered Lord Palmerston's return to the Foreign Office 'fraught with danger to the peace of Europe.' So on December 20 Peel withdrew his offer of resignation and called a Cabinet Council. Stanley alone resigned, as he thought the Corn Law ought to

* *Letters of Queen Victoria*, ii., 49.

be adhered to, and might have been maintained, and the Duke of Wellington characteristically said he thought the Corn Law was a subordinate consideration. All the other members of the Cabinet eventually fell into line with their chief.

This resumption of office was quite unexpected by Disraeli. He, of course, had no part in any negotiations, and indeed had no personal interest in the question whether the repeal of the Corn Laws, now apparently inevitable, was to be carried by a Liberal or by a so-called Conservative Government. He would not be a member or supporter of either. He would have preferred to see the staunch Tories giving a free vote against the change from the Opposition benches than see them dragooned into reluctant support of a renegade Prime Minister.

But in the interval between the proffered resignation of Sir Robert Peel and his resumption of the duties and responsibilities of office Disraeli had written a letter which was at once an act of patriotism and a generous forgiveness of the personal attack before recorded. In conversation with Louis Philippe he had discovered that the King shared the fear, which was widely felt both in England and France, that the anticipated appointment of Lord Palmerston as Foreign Secretary might lead to strained relations between the two countries. He assured him that he was mistaken, and the next day he wrote a long and somewhat formal letter to Lord Palmerston, with whom he was not on terms of personal friendship, giving a full account of the conversation, and urging him to make some declaration of policy when the new Government met Parliament which would remove this mischievous impression. Lord Palmerston wrote on December 18 a reply in which he thanked Disraeli warmly for his letter, and said, 'I have the strongest conviction that the great foundation of the foreign policy, both of an English and a French Government, ought to be a cordial and

sincere understanding between England and France,' and authorised him to give this assurance to anybody with whom he conversed. By the time this letter was delivered in Paris the unexpected had happened, and Grey's distrust of Palmerston had placed Sir Robert Peel again in power. Six months later, when the Russell Ministry began a term of office which lasted for six years, Palmerston was Foreign Secretary and Grey took the Colonies. Palmerston always gratefully remembered, and in subsequent years handsomely repaid, the service Disraeli had rendered him by this letter.

The closing words of each of these letters are interesting. Disraeli, writing from his rooms in the Rue de Rivoli, said: 'If Parliament be summoned speedily, I do not think I shall be tempted to quit this agreeable residence, especially as the great object of my political career is now achieved.'

Palmerston's comment on this was: 'Whatever may be the allurements of Paris, I think you will hardly refrain from being in your place on so curious and interesting an occasion as the opening of the approaching session of Parliament.'

When these letters were written, both writers expected that the new session would find Lord John Russell in office as Prime Minister ready to press forward the immediate repeal of the Corn Laws, with the assured support of Sir Robert Peel and all the members of the late Cabinet, except Stanley. If this expectation were to be realised, Disraeli would have seen no opening for useful and promising work in the House of Commons until the change had been completely carried through. He would probably have remained in Paris, and spent his leisure in finishing *Tancred*, which had been commenced and almost finished at Cassel, and which he hoped to publish in 1846. The return of Sir Robert Peel to the control of Parliamentary action altered his plans, and when, on January 22, 1846, the Queen's Speech was delivered,

the address in reply moved and seconded, and Peel and Russell gave long and dull explanations of their conduct in the Ministerial crisis of the previous month, the assailant of the Ministry was quite ready to renew the attack. It was announced that the Government proposals with regard to the Corn Laws would be laid before the House on January 27, but Peel had not confined himself to personal explanation, but in his long and confused speech, which lasted two hours and filled thirty columns of *Hansard*, had dealt with the tariff alterations of the last four years.

'The bewildered House,' Disraeli wrote in his *Life of Lord George Bentinck*, 'listened once more to lucid narratives of the price of flax and wool previous and subsequent to recent changes in the customs, some dissertation on domestic lard, the contract price of salt beef for the Navy, and the importation of foreign cattle.' Disraeli saw his opportunity, and took it with superb energy and effect. He rose when Peel and Russell had reduced the House to a condition of puzzled exhaustion, and in a few minutes had roused it to excitement and enthusiasm. The speech he then delivered made him the real leader of the Tory party. Justin McCarthy, no favourable critic, wrote in his *Life of Sir Robert Peel*: 'The speech was made just at the right moment: it found the Conservative party reeling and staggering; it rallied them into a party once again. For an interval yet the Protectionists were to be led by Lord George Bentinck, but from the moment when he delivered his speech he was marked out as the real inspiration and guide of the party.' The speech, indeed, deserves and rewards careful study, and is perhaps the finest example of the skill of a great master of debate. One biting passage has been so often quoted as to have become a literary classic. It demands quotation here.

Sir, there is a difficulty in finding a parallel to the position of the right honourable gentleman [Sir Robert Peel] in any part of history. The only parallel which

I can find is an incident in the late war in the Levant, which was terminated by the policy of the noble Lord [Palmerston] opposite. I remember when that great struggle was taking place, when the existence of the Turkish Empire was at stake, the late Sultan, a man of great energy and fertile in resources, was determined to fit out an immense fleet to maintain his empire. Accordingly a vast armament was collected. It consisted of some of the finest ships that were ever built. The crews were picked men, the officers were the finest that could be found, and both officers and men were rewarded before they fought. There never was an armament which left the Dardanelles similarly appointed since the days of Solyman the Great. The Sultan personally witnessed the departure of the fleet; all the muftis prayed for the success of the expedition, as all the muftis here prayed for the success of the late General Election. Away went the fleet; but what was the Sultan's consternation when the Lord High Admiral steered at once into the enemy's port! Now, Sir, the Lord High Admiral on that occasion was very much misrepresented. He, too, was called a traitor, and he, too, vindicated himself. 'True it is,' said he, 'I did place myself at the head of this valiant armada; true it is that my Sovereign embraced me; true it is that all the muftis in the empire offered up prayers for my success; but I have an objection to war. I see no use in prolonging the struggle, and the only reason that I had for accepting the command was that I might terminate the contest by betraying my master.' And, Sir, these reasons offered by a man of great plausibility, of vast adroitness, have had their effect, for—you may be surprised at it, but I assure you it is a fact, which, by the way, the gallant officer opposite [Commodore Napier] can testify—that he is at this moment the First Lord of the Admiralty at Constantinople under the new reign. The gallant Commodore says that he is dead. At any rate, he was not shot for treason.

This passage had no doubt been carefully prepared, but if these and other phrases of apt illustration or keen invective betray the literary finish of well-considered oratory, they were woven so dexterously

into Disraeli's comment on the speech to which he was replying as to give the whole address a charming air of spontaneity.

The lasting importance of this speech makes it only reasonable that two more passages should be quoted:

Sir, we must ask ourselves, as members of the House of Commons, as the subjects of a popular Government—we must ask ourselves what were the means, what the machinery, by which the right honourable gentleman acquired his position, how he obtained power to turn round upon his supporters, and to treat them with contempt and disdain. Sir, the right honourable gentleman has supported a different policy for a number of years. Well do we remember on this side of the House—perhaps not without a blush—well do we remember the efforts which we made to raise him to the bench on which he now sits. Who does not remember the 'sacred cause of Protection,' the cause for which Sovereigns were thwarted, Parliament dissolved, and a nation taken in? Delightful indeed to have the right honourable gentleman entering into all his confidential details when, to use his own courtly language, he 'called upon' his Sovereign. Sir, he called on his Sovereign; but would his Sovereign have called upon the right honourable Baronet if, in 1841, he had not placed himself, as he said, at the head of the gentlemen of England—that well-known position, to be preferred even to the confidence of Sovereigns and Courts? It is all very well for the right honourable Baronet to take this high-flying course, but I think myself—I say it with great respect for gentlemen on this side of the House, and gentlemen on the other; I say it without any wish to achieve a party triumph, for I believe I belong to a party which can triumph no more; for we have nothing left on our side but the constituencies which we have betrayed; but I do say my conception of a great statesman is of one who represents a great idea—an idea which may lead him to power; an idea with which he may identify himself; an idea which he may develop; an idea which he may and can impress on the mind and conscience of a nation. That, Sir, is my notion of what makes a man

a great statesman. I do not care whether he be a manufacturer or a manufacturer's son. That is a grand, that is, indeed, an heroic position. But I care not what may be the position of a man who never originates an idea—a watcher of the atmosphere, a man who, as he says, takes his observations, and when he finds the wind in a certain quarter, trims to suit it. Such a person may be a powerful Minister, but he is no more a great statesman than the man who gets up behind a carriage is a great whip. Both are disciples of progress; both, perhaps, may get a good place. But how far the original momentum is indebted to their powers, and how far their guiding prudence regulates the lash or the rein, it is not necessary for me to notice. . . .

If you had a daring, dashing Minister, a Danby, or a Walpole, who tells you frankly, 'I am corrupt and I wish you to be corrupt also,' we might guard against this; but what I cannot endure is, to hear a man come down and say, 'I will rule without respect of party, though I rose by party, and I care not for your judgement, for I look to posterity.' Sir, very few people reach posterity. Posterity is a most limited assembly. Those gentlemen who reach posterity are not much more numerous than the planets. But one thing is quite evident, that while we are appealing to posterity, that while we are admitting the principle of relaxed commerce, there is extreme danger of our admitting the principle of relaxed politics. I advise, therefore, that we all, whatever be our opinions about Free Trade, oppose the introduction of free politics. Let men stand by the principle by which they rise, right or wrong. I make no exception. If they be in the wrong, they must retire to that shade of private life with which our present rulers have often threatened us. There are always men ready to form a Governmen, and if the noble Lord [Lord John Russell] had formed one, and the country would not support Free Trade, that would not show that his principles were wrong; but it would show a great political fact, important in the state of our country, that the nation was not ripe for those opinions, or that it was against them. This is a legitimate thing, but it is not a legitimate trial of the principle of Free Trade against the principle of Protection if a Parliament, the majority

of which are elected to support Protection, be gained over to Free Trade by the arts of the very individual whom they were elected to support in an opposite career. It is not fair to the people of England. . . The Minister who attained, as he did, the position which the right honourable Baronet now fills is not the Minister who ought to abrogate the Corn Laws.

CHAPTER XI

THE DETHRONEMENT OF PEEL

On January 27 Sir Robert Peel, in a speech which occupied three hours in delivery and fills forty-five dull columns of *Hansard's* reports, explained the Government proposals. The Corn Laws were to be repealed at the end of three years, and meanwhile there was to be a sliding scale of duty on corn of ten shillings when the average price of corn was forty-eight shillings a quarter, the tax being reduced by one shilling for every shilling increase in price until that reached fifty-three shillings. No discussion of these proposals then took place, and it was arranged that on February 9 the Prime Minister would move that the House should go into Committee of Supply, and then submit the resolutions, on which legislation would be founded.

A new political situation had now been created. In view of the failure of Lord John Russell to form a Government, the Edinburgh letter left him and his friends pledged to support Sir Robert Peel in his policy of repeal. Unless the Tory members could be detached from their allegiance to him, the Prime Minister would be able to carry his proposals through the House of Commons without meeting any serious resistance, and the apparent unanimity of that House, and the commanding influence of the Duke of Wellington, would deter the Peers from entering into a conflict which would certainly result in a repetition of the humiliation of 1832. But time and organisation were needed, and the danger was urgent. There existed, indeed, an Association for the Protection of Agriculture, with the Duke of Richmond for its

President, but it was not very powerful. In spite of Disraeli's repeated warnings, many of those who sat behind Sir Robert Peel in the House of Commons had up to the last believed that their leader was trustworthy, and that defensive action outside the House was quite unnecessary. Now a special meeting was called of all Conservative members, whether they had or had not joined the society, and at Disraeli's inspiration, and on lines he devised, a plan of operations was arranged.

The chief decision was that the debate which was to begin on February 9 should be prolonged as much as possible. The object was not only to delay the first important division. That was very desirable, for four elections were pending, in one of which a member of the Government, who had changed his office and therefore needed re-election, was thought to be in danger of defeat. Success in these elections might influence many votes in the House, and have useful effect in other constituencies. But the more important purpose was to induce men of standing and influence who had not hitherto taken part in Parliamentary debate to come out and declare strongly their resolve not to follow Peel. That declaration once made, they would not go back, and their example would bring feebler spirits to their support. So on February 9, when the motion to go into committee was made, and a hostile amendment was moved and seconded by two of the most experienced and most highly esteemed members of the Conservative party—Mr. Philip Miles, the member for Bristol, and Sir William Heathcote, who represented Hampshire—Disraeli had a list, to which every day additions were made, of men who were ready whenever need arose to carry forward the debate. There was no difficulty in finding them. Lord John Russell seems to have thought that a night or two would suffice for the discussion, and he made a quite unimportant speech on the first night. But on the next day the Marquis

of Granby made a powerful attack on the Prime Minister and a forcible appeal to doubtful members. The somewhat sluggish tide of oratory rolled steadily on. On the fifth night Sir Robert Peel, who had undertaken that no other business than the Corn Laws should be taken in Government time until the House had declared its judgement upon them, and was becoming seriously embarrassed by the delay, endeavoured to bring the debate to a close by another very long and elaborate speech in general reply to his assailants.

But there was no division. Lord John Manners moved the adjournment, and in a brilliant speech on the following night challenged the Prime Minister to advise a dissolution, and take the opinion of the constituencies on a policy upon which they had never been consulted. The debate went on, and on the eighth night Disraeli intervened with a long speech, which still deserves careful study. It dealt very little with personal or party questions, but contained a closely reasoned examination of the question whether it is fair to the great industries of the country, agriculture being the most important, to adopt a system of free imports while hostile tariffs are set up by other countries. His policy was a policy of fair trade. Again the debate was adjourned, and it was not until nearly midnight of February 27, the twelfth night of the discussion, that Lord George Bentinck began the closing speech. At three o'clock in the morning of February 28 the division took place. The Whigs and Radicals gave the Minister a majority, but into the lobby, where he met his unwonted allies, Sir Robert Peel could only lead 112, forty of whom were officials, while 231 of those who had throughout the Parliament been his faithful followers now finally threw off their allegiance. Two hundred and twenty-seven Liberals voted with him, but his majority was only twenty-seven. This only decided that the House would go into committee to consider the Government

proposals, which dealt with many duties besides those relating to corn, and from March 6 to 20 diligent discussion went on with regard to hops, and butter, and silk, and stockings, and timber. At last the resolutions were passed, the Bill to give effect to them was read a first time without debate, and the second reading was fixed for March 23. Four more days were then spent in debate, and when on March 27 the division was taken, only 101 Conservatives supported Peel. His majority was 88.

A new difficulty now presented itself to the harassed Minister. In the speech delivered by the Queen at the opening of the session reference was made to 'the very frequent instances in which the crime of deliberate assassination had been of late committed in Ireland,' and Parliament was invited to consider 'whether any measures could be devised calculated to give increased protection to life.' It was not until February 24, when Parliament had been sitting for a month, that a Coercion Bill was introduced into the House of Lords, where, with the strong support of the Whig leaders, it passed all stages, and was sent down to the House of Commons. At the first sitting of that House after the second reading of the Corn Bill, Sir James Graham moved that the orders of the day should be postponed in order that the Coercion Bill might be introduced and read a first time.

Now a curious Parliamentary situation arose. The Protectionists, who welcomed the delay of the Corn Bill, supported the Government, the Whigs and Radicals, with, of course, the vigorous assistance of the Irish members, insisted that the Corn Bill should make uninterrupted progress; and on a division it was only by a majority of 39 that Sir James Graham's motion was carried. Now the Coercion Bill was introduced, and the Irishmen took up the work of obstruction. For three nights before the Easter holiday and for three nights after it they kept up the debate, and it was not until May 2 that the first

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reading was carried by a majority of 149. Russell and his followers voted with the Government; Lord George Bentinck, who had yielded to the repeated persuasion of his friends that he should become the leader of the new party, led them into the same lobby. Disraeli, whose advice to refrain from supporting the Coercion Bill had not been taken, left the House without voting. It appears likely that if his advice had been followed the Ministry would have been defeated that night, and the Corn Bill and the Government would have disappeared together. There was one more great debate before the Corn Bill went to the House of Peers. It was read a third time on May 15, when Disraeli closed a three nights' debate by a speech of extraordinary power. In view of the importance of this speech, space must be found for quotation:

The right honourable gentleman had no cause to complain of his party. It is very true that on a subsequent occasion 240 gentlemen recorded their sense of his conduct. But then he might have remembered the considerable section of converts that he obtained, even in the last hour. Why, what a compliment to a Minister—not only to vote for him, but to vote for him against your opinions, and in favour of opinions which he had always drilled you to distrust! That was a scene, I believe, unprecedented in the House of Commons. Indeed, I recollect nothing equal to it, unless it be the conversion of the Saxons by Charlemagne, which is the only historical incident that bears any parallel to that illustrious occasion. Ranged on the banks of the Rhine, the Saxons determined to resist any further movement on the part of the great Cæsar; but when the Emperor appeared, instead of conquering, he converted them. How were they converted? In battalions. The old chronicle informs us they were converted in battalions and baptised in platoons. It was utterly impossible to bring these individuals from a state of reprobation to a state of grace with a celerity sufficiently quick. When I saw the hundred and twelve fall into rank and

file, I was irresistibly reminded of that memorable incident on the banks of the Rhine. . . .

When I examine the career of this Minister, which has now filled a great space in the Parliamentary history of his country, I find that between thirty and forty years, from the days of Mr. Horner to the days of the honourable member for Stockport [Mr. Cobden], that right honourable gentleman has traded on the ideas and intelligence of others. His life has been a great appropriation clause. He is a burglar of others' intellect. Search the *Index* of Beatson from the days of the Conqueror to the termination of the last reign, there is no statesman who has committed political petty larceny on so great a scale. . . .

I know, Sir, that there are many who believe that the time is gone by when one can appeal to those high and honest impulses that were once the mainstay and the main element of the English character. I know, Sir, that we appeal to a people debauched by public gambling, stimulated and encouraged by an inefficient and a short-sighted Minister. I know that the public mind is polluted with economic fancies, a depraved desire that the rich may become richer without the interference of industry and toil. I know, Sir, that all confidence in public men is lost. But, Sir, I have faith in the primitive and enduring elements of the English character. It may be vain now, in the midnight of their intoxication, to teli them that there will be an awakening of bitterness; it may be idle now, in the springtide of their economic frenzy, to warn them that there may be an ebb of trouble. But the dark and inevitable hour will arrive. Then, when their spirits are softened by misfortune, they will recur to those principles that made England great, and which, in our belief, will only keep England great. Then, too, Sir, perchance they may remember, not with unkindness, those who, betrayed and deserted, were neither ashamed nor afraid to struggle for the 'good old cause,'—the cause with which are associated principles the most popular, sentiments the most entirely national, the cause of labour, the cause of the people, the cause of England.

In the division, although 223 Liberals voted with the Government, the majority was only 98.

The rest of the story of Peel's dethronement can be briefly told.

The second reading of the Corn Bill was carried in the House of Lords by the unexpectedly large majority of 47, obtained entirely by the unwearied efforts of the Duke of Wellington, who was himself opposed to the measure.

The question before Disraeli now was one of great difficulty. Russell, having settled the personal disagreements which had prevented his forming a Ministry six months before, was now eager to join in defeating the Government, but would do nothing to displace them until the Corn Bill had passed all its stages in the Lords. But, on the other hand, Disraeli knew that there were many of those who had bitterly opposed Peel while there was a chance of preventing the passage of the Corn Bill, who would be reluctant to vote against him when the only result of their doing so would be to put the Whigs in office. He again urged a bold course, and his persistence prevailed. During June the further progress of the Coercion Bill in the House of Commons was vigorously resisted and with some difficulty the debate on the second reading was prolonged in the hope that the division might be postponed until the Lords had passed or rejected the Corn Bill. This hope was fulfilled. On June 25 the debate was interrupted by the announcement by the Speaker that the House of Lords had agreed to the Corn Importation Bill and the Customs Duties Bill without any amendment.

A few hours later the Coercion Bill was rejected by a majority of 73. On the following day the Government resigned, and a few days later a Whig Ministry was in office with Lord John Russell at its head.

CHAPTER XII

'TANCRED' AND HUGHENDEN

THE autumn of this exciting year was spent at Bradenham, and at Christmas Disraeli described himself as 'a hermit who has been immured for four months among those beechen groves of Bucks which not even Julius Cæsar could penetrate, and who had seen no one.' He had not been in good health, and there was, as was usual with him, a period of reaction, almost amounting to prostration, when the labour of the Parliamentary session came to an end. He needed the rest and refreshment of the country home to which he was so much attached, and he was resolved to finish the third of the three books planned at Deepdene, which had been begun in the previous year at Cassel. He enjoyed, for the last time, a long stay with his father. Between them there were ties of very deep affection. At every step in his public life Disraeli had been strengthened and encouraged by his father's admiring sympathy and wise counsel, and his steady advance to fame and power had been some consolation to Isaac D'Israeli under the affliction of total blindness which had fallen upon him four years earlier. The old man still worked at preparing a new edition of his books, with the loving help of his daughter Sarah. She and her brother loved each other dearly, and these four months of companionship must to all of them have been a very happy time.

Disraeli worked hard, and by the end of the year *Tancred, or the New Crusade*, was ready for the printer. It would hardly be correct to say that the book was finished. The topic which at Deepdene Disraeli had

resolved to treat in the third of the volumes then planned was 'the duties of the Church as a main remedial agency in our present state.' That subject was not touched at all in *Tancred*. The first third of the book is a delightful comedy of high society in England; the rest is a fantastic and confused story of Eastern life, set against a background of the most qeautiful descriptions of the scenery of Palestine and Syria, and of the habits of their people, which are to be found in English literature. The book is very pleasant to read. (Curiously enough, it is the only one of Disraeli's works which can be read by the blind, for it is the only one which has been printed in Braille.) But what, if anything, *Tancred* intended to do, and why, whatever it is, it should be called a crusade, are secrets which the author kept to himself. In December Disraeli wrote to Lady Londonderry: 'My hero, whose name is Tancred, will make his appearance, I hope, in a month. He has turned out a much more troublesome and unmanageable personage than I anticipated.' He was, indeed, too troublesome for his creator to finish his story. The book had to be brought to an end somehow; so directly after Eva, a young Jewess, has fainted on Tancred's shoulder under the shock of his proposing to marry her, the author cuts the Gordian knot, which he himself has woven, by a sentence which ends the book and contains neither explanation nor prophecy, 'The Duke and Duchess of Bellamont had arrived at Jerusalem.'

It was not quite true to say that the hermit had seen no one, for in the early weeks of December Lord George Bentinck had spent a few days at Bradenham. He had given up the turf, sold all his horses, and was devoting himself to the duties of the leadership of the new party in the House of Commons. He came to consult Disraeli upon certain proposals which they intended to bring forward for the promotion of railway construction in Ireland, and also upon the practical and pressing question of the seats which

they and their friends should occupy when the House sat again in February, 1847. Upon his defeat and resignation Sir Robert Peel and those Tories who had voted with him went over to the Opposition benches, while Bentinck and his followers continued to sit, as far as they could find room, on the overcrowded seats on the Government side. This was very inconvenient, and it was arranged that Bentinck, with Disraeli at his side, should take the accustomed place of the leader of the Opposition. Peel and two or three of his former colleagues sat on the same bench. From that day forward the real leadership belonged to Disraeli. It was not yet formally acknowledged, but for thirty years he was in every great debate the most powerful and most authoritative spokesman of his party.

The General Election of 1847 greatly increased his influence in the House, for he exchanged his contentious seat at Shrewsbury for an unopposed seat for the county of Bucks, which he held with unassailable strength until, in 1876, he passed with universal approval to the dignity of the House of Lords.

His address to the electors of his new constituency was dated May 25, 1847, and instead of the 'Bradenham' which had headed all his previous election addresses it was headed 'Hughenden Manor.' Two months earlier, with characteristic disregard of some obvious financial difficulties, he had purchased a modest estate of 750 acres on the southern slope of the Chiltern Hills not far from Bradenham, where a pleasant house with long south frontage and terraced walk looks down the grassy slope to a well-wooded valley. His wife delighted, as did he, in the comfort and repose of this lovely country home, and every autumn, when the work of Parliament was over, they went with ever-increasing gladness to enjoy its peaceful pleasures.

The election address was a pronouncement the interest and value of which have not been lessened

by the course of political events in later years. Its length forbids its full insertion here, but there is one sentence which demands quotation. It makes one see how great a misfortune it was for the country that not until 1874 did he have the power, as head of a strong Government and a united party, to carry out the policy which in 1847 he declared.

It is unnecessary for me to state that I shall support all those measures the object of which is to elevate the moral and social condition of the working classes, by lessening their hours of toil, by improving their means of health, and by cultivating their intelligence. These are objects which, it is not unpleasing for me to remember, I endeavoured, in common with some of my friends, to advance before they engaged the attention of Governments, or were supported by triumphant Parliamentary majorities.

Nor would Disraeli's character be completely understood if the proud declaration of personal independence which he made in one of his speeches during the election were omitted from these pages.

Independence is the necessary, the essential element of my political position. . . . I cannot take a seat in the House of Commons if I am not the master of my political destiny. I have not gained the position which I am proud to remember I occupy there, but by my own individual exertions. It has cost me days of thought and nights of toil; it has cost me unwearied industry, frequent discomfiture, and many unequal contests. I have gained that position by myself, and I must maintain it by myself.

CHAPTER XIII

TAKING THE LEAD

The independence and courage shown in this declaration were soon to be severely tried. When Lord John Russell went to the city of London for re-election on taking office as Prime Minister, his proposer was Baron Lionel Rothschild; and at the General Election of July, 1847, Baron Rothschild was returned as his colleague with 7,000 votes. He could not take his seat in the House of Commons, for as the law then stood he would have to take the prescribed oath 'on the true faith of a Christian.' The duty of the Prime Minister was clear; and soon after the House met in November he brought forward a proposal for the immediate and complete removal of the remaining civil and political disabilities of the Jews. Both Lord George Bentinck and Disraeli spoke and voted in favour of the motion, while the majority of the party they led were resolute against it. To these, the stalwarts of the Tory party, Disraeli's speech was most unwelcome. It was heard for the most part in silence, but there were occasional murmurs of disapproval. He put the claim of the Jewish people to all the privileges of citizenship upon the highest ground.

In exact proportion to your faith ought to be your wish to do this great act of national justice. If you had not forgotten what you owe to this people, if you were grateful for that literature which for thousands of years has brought so much instruction and so much consolation to the souls of men, you as Christians would be only too ready to seize the first opportunity of meeting the claims of those who profess this religion.

But you are influenced by the darkest superstitions of the darkest ages that ever existed in this country. . . . I cannot sit in this House with any misconception of my opinion on the subject. Whatever may be the consequences on the seat I hold—and I should not have referred to such a consideration unless other gentlemen had done so—I cannot for one give a vote which is not in deference to what I believe to be the true principles of religion.

How serious was the danger to his political future which Disraeli so courageously faced was shown by the fact that Lord George Bentinck's speech and vote brought to a close his leadership of the party in the House of Commons. A remonstrance from a considerable section of his followers was sent to him, and he at once declined to act any longer as leader, and resolved to leave the front Opposition bench and sit below the gangway. Disraeli offered to accompany him, but Lord George would not hear of it, and when Parliament reassembled in February, 1848, he was in the leader's seat. His position was one of great difficulty, for there was no party organisation. He said in the *Life of Lord George Bentinck*, which he wrote three years later: 'The session was to commence without a leader, without any recognised organ of communication between parties, or any responsible representative of opinion in debates. All again was chaos.' This situation could not be allowed to continue; and presently Lord Stanley, who had been, immediately after the fall of Peel's Ministry, recognised as the leader of the new party, took the matter seriously in hand. He was not very friendly with Disraeli, as we have already seen, but he could not ignore the fact that the man he had succeeded in excluding from office in 1841 had, in the course of seven years, become the most powerful debater in the House of Commons. So he opened communications with him, and in July he dined with the Disraelis at Grosvenor Gate. In August he joined with Bentinck

in persuading Disraeli, who was very weary, and suffering at the time from ill-health and from financial difficulties connected with the purchase of Hughenden, to close the session with an attack on the Government which should 'give a tone to public opinion and an impulse to public discontent for some months.' It was with some reluctance that Disraeli undertook the task. But he saw the greatness of the opportunity. The day before the speech was delivered he wrote to Lady Londonderry, 'To-morrow is my Waterloo, but whether for triumph or discomfiture I dare not now foresee.' It was triumph, unquestioned and unforgettable. His own report to his wife was, 'The success has exceeded our most sanguine expectations and hopes.' Thirty years later he told Corry that this speech gave him the leadership.

A few days later Disraeli went to Harcourt House to say good-bye for the autumn to Lord George Bentinck. They were both much exhausted with the labours of the session, but as they clasped hands at parting Lord George, cheerful and confident, said, 'God bless you; we must work, and the country will come round to us.' They never met again. Bentinck went off to Welbeck; and Disraeli, after a week or two of urgent private business in London, went with his wife to spend a few restful weeks with the Londonderrys, his close and constant friends. Here, on September 24, he heard the dreadful news that the friend and leader to whom he was bound by personal ties far stronger than those political connections which knit them together had, three days before, been found lying dead by a footpath near his father's house. Personally and politically it was a heavy blow. In the admiring confidence and the affectionate regard of Lord George and his two brothers, Disraeli found most valuable support for his Parliamentary career, and constant help in the financial embarrassments from which he was never wholly free. The friendship of the surviving brothers never failed him,

but it was the industry and courage of Lord George which had been a great factor in his political success. He returned at once to London, and there found on his library table a letter of six sheets of paper, which his friend had written only an hour before starting on his fatal walk.

Now, of course, the question of the leadership of the House of Commons became urgent, and Lord Stanley asked the Marquis of Granby if he would undertake it. He refused, but suggested that Disraeli should be asked if he would be willing to serve under Herries. So on December 21 Stanley wrote a long letter to Disraeli inviting him to render a great service to the party, and establish a strong personal claim for himself in the future, by setting the example to others of promising to support Herries. This letter only reached Disraeli on the 26th, and he answered it on the same day by a civil but definite refusal. Meanwhile Herries, who knew nothing of this letter to Disraeli, had, on the ground of his advanced age, refused to entertain the proposal of leadership which Lord Stanley had made to him.

Time was pressing, for Parliament was to meet on the first day of February, 1849, and the question of the leadership of the House of Commons must in some way be settled. At a meeting at which Disraeli was not present it was decided that the post must for the present be put into commission, Disraeli, the Marquis of Granby, and Herries, having joint authority. Disraeli did not accept this arrangement, and took little notice of it. When the House met he was in the leader's place; and as soon as the address to the Crown had been moved and seconded he rose, and, in a long and weighty speech, dealt with all the immediately important questions of domestic and foreign policy. In appearance, in manner, and in the tone of his speech he was greatly changed. The eccentricities of costume and the affectations of manner had disappeared. Dressed in the black frock

coat buttoned across the chest which from this time forward was his invariable wear when in town, and dismissing the artifices of tone and gesture which had strongly marked his early speeches, he in the unmistakable accents of leadership announced the policy of his party. He declined to reopen in this Parliament the old controversy on which both Houses of Parliament had pronounced a decided and immediately effective judgement. He had not changed his opinion. He still held that to adopt a system of free imports in the belief that foreign nations would abandon their hostile tariffs was to 'indulge a vain and delusive hope.' The true commercial policy was a system of reciprocity. 'Reciprocity,' he said, 'is indeed a great principle. It is at once cosmopolitan and national. The system you are pursuing is quite contrary; you are fighting hostile tariffs with free imports, and the consequence is you are following a course most injurious to the commerce of the country.'

He protested against a constant and fussy interference with the affairs of other countries, but he added: 'In making these remarks I am far from wishing to enforce a pedantic adherence to the passive policy which, in the barbarous dialect of the day, is called non-intervention.' And he followed this by a fine declaration of the purpose and character of the foreign policy he would himself uphold. 'I am persuaded that in the settlement of the great affairs of Europe the presence of England is the best guarantee of peace. But it should be the presence of England in accordance with the law of nations and with the stipulations of treaties.'

On March 8 Disraeli moved that the House should go into committee to consider the burdens on land with a view to remove the grievances of which the owners and occupiers of real property justly complained, they being exposed by recent changes in the law to direct competition with the untaxed produce of foreign countries. In an elaborate and powerful

speech he contended that the landed and agricultural classes, against whose resistance, and at whose heavy cost, the policy of the free import of corn had now been definitely adopted, should in justice be relieved of the local burdens which pressed unfairly upon them. He reminded the Prime Minister that in 1846, when communicating to the Queen his failure to form a Government, he said that had he been successful in doing so he would have accompanied a proposal for the immediate and complete establishment of free trade in corn with 'measures of relief to a considerable extent of the occupiers of land from the burdens to which they were subjected.' He claimed that such measures should now promptly be devised. And he pointed out that Sir Robert Peel himself, when he was a defender of taxes on the import of corn, had rested his defence of the then existing system upon its fairness in balancing the heavy burden of local taxation by protecting the price of the produce of the land. In this motion Disraeli hoped that he would have the support of the Peelites. But now a very curious incident occurred. The debate was adjourned to March 15, and in the interval a Bill for the repeal of the Navigation Laws was brought up for second reading. In the speech just referred to Disraeli had incidentally repeated his disbelief in the policy of meeting hostile tariffs by a system of free imports, and had advocated the adoption of the principle of reciprocity. In the debate on the Navigation Laws on March 12 Gladstone supported this contention and almost echoed his phrases. 'It has been contended,' he said, 'that reciprocity was contrary to principle in theory, and likewise that it was found impracticable to execute. I, on the other hand, contend that it is according to all precedent and experience that it is founded on justice, and that it is far more easy to carry out than the plan of retaliation proposed by Her Majesty's Government.' And he announced that in committee he would propose an amendment 'to

secure for the British shipowner an unrestricted entrance into those fields of employment from which he is now excluded as a compensation for his being compelled to share with the foreigner the trade in other fields hitherto exclusively confined to him.'

Here opened at once a prospect of important events. The Peelites voted with the Government on the second reading of the Bill, but even with their help the majority was only fifty-six. And their support was conditional. If Gladstone's amendment were pressed in committee and came to a division, the defeat and resignation of the Government appeared certain. There was excitement in the Conservative camp. Stanley and Disraeli were in close consultation. The constitution of the new Cabinet was discussed. Stanley said that Disraeli must be the chief Minister in the House of Commons; Disraeli, who believed that if the Peelites rejoined their old associates Sir James Graham would be the strongest leader in the Commons of the reunited party, and was unselfishly willing to serve under his lead if by this sacrifice reunion could be secured, was inclined to choose the Home Office or the India Office for himself. Then the scene suddenly changed. When the Navigation Bill came into committee, Gladstone abandoned the promised amendment. 'The Government declined to accept it. I therefore withdrew it'; this was his subsequent explanation.

It is not to be wondered at that Disraeli wrote to Lord John Manners: 'As for the Peelites, they are more mysterious and hostile than ever. No one knows what they are after.'

The fact was that no one desired to bring about a change of Government until the fifty or sixty members who still followed the personal lead of Sir Robert Peel had decided whether they would or would not join, or at least support, a Conservative administration. Disraeli himself was not ready for a change. In the letter just quoted he said: 'How

Stanley, if the Whigs at the end of the session play him a trick, is to form a Government, find at least seven Cabinet Ministers in the Commons and obout thirty-five other officials there, surpasses imagination.' Through this difficult year his great trouble was that there was a sharp difference of opinion between him and Lord Stanley upon the most important question of public policy. Stanley watched with sympathy the fluttering agitation which went on in the agricultural districts, and hoped for an early outburst of reaction which would reverse the decision of 1846. Disraeli, with sounder judgement, saw that not only was it impossible to procure such a reversal from the existing Parliament, but that it was in the highest degree improbable that a dissolution would bring back a Protectionist majority. And he saw quite clearly that to go to the constituencies with ambiguous declarations on two alternative policies would be simply to court disaster. He, for his own part, was consistent in his repeated avowals that, while his own opinions were unchanged, he recognised that the new system which Parliament in both Houses had deliberately adopted must be allowed to have a full and fair trial. His immediate and practical policy was to withdraw his party from the hopeless question of restoring the taxes on food, upon which the industrial districts were united against them, and to rally to his side all the members who were connected, either personally or by their constituencies, with the land, by a series of motions to relieve the agricultural interest by revising, and partially removing, the local taxation of the country. Obviously it was of supreme importance that the Peelites should be induced to return to full co-operation with their old associates, and he spared no pains to bring this about, and was prepared to make any personal sacrifice. In the early days of 1850, through the friendly good offices of Lord Londonderry, he let Sir James Graham know that he was ready 'to call

his friends together and tell them that they must look to the best practicable mode of governing the country; that Sir James was the only man then to be at the head of the House of Commons, and that he would cheerfully act under him.' Graham refused to entertain the proposal, and referred somewhat scornfully to the inconsistent speeches and actions of the leaders of the Opposition. Disraeli did not lose heart, and the first important debate in the session of 1850 brought him encouragement. He renewed the motion of the previous year for a committee of the whole House to consider the mitigation of agricultural distress. This time Gladstone spoke in support of the motion, and with Sidney Herbert and nearly twenty Peelites voted with Disraeli. The Government majority was now only twenty-one—273 against 252.

Gladstone wrote a long letter to his wife the next day describing the debate, and in view of the later hostility between the two statesmen it is pleasant for the biographer of Disraeli to quote a few lines from the letter. 'Disraeli showed the marvellous talent that he has for summing up with brilliancy, buoyancy, and comprehensiveness, at the close of a debate. You have heard me speak of that talent before when I have been wholly against him; but never, last night or at any time, would I go to him for conviction, but for the delight of the ear and the fancy.'

CHAPTER XIV

DON PACIFICO AND THE 'LIFE OF BENTINCK'

In this debate Peel and Graham had spoken and voted in support of the Government. Gladstone's adoption of Disraeli's policy, and the fact that he could bring so many Peelites into the Conservative lobby, were welcome symptoms of disunion among Peel's followers, though the complete reunion which Disraeli desired seemed as far off as ever. But in June, 1850, an opportunity for joint action occurred which seemed to promise very important results. One Don Pacifico, a Portuguese Jew who had been born in Malta, and had thereby acquired the status of a British citizen, resided in Athens, and complained that his house had been attacked and pillaged, and called upon the British Foreign Minister to support and enforce his claim that the Greek Government should pay him compensation. Lord Palmerston demanded that payment should be made, and, becoming angry with the delays and excuses of the Greeks, took on himself to send British ships to the Piræus with orders to seize the Greek vessels lying in the harbour. This was done, in spite of the fact that the mediation of France had been offered and accepted. The French Ambassador was withdrawn from London, and Europe was gravely disturbed. Stanley proposed and carried in the House of Lords a motion of censure on the Government. Lord John Russell felt that he must resign office unless a vote of confidence was obtained from the House of Commons. So Mr. Roebuck was put up to move a resolution which did not refer specifically to the Don Pacifico case, but expressed general approval of the

foreign policy of the Government. Now for the first time since the fall of Peel's Ministry in 1846 the two sections of the Conservative party came into consultation and joint action, and on the occasion of the first important debate in the new House of Commons Disraeli sent Forbes Mackenzie, who had just been appointed one of the Conservative Whips, to ask Sir Robert Peel, under whom he had formerly served as a Lord of the Treasury, whether he wished to close the debate, which was to be opened on the Conservative side by Gladstone, who then made his first speech in the House of Commons on foreign affairs. Sir Robert said he certainly meant to speak, but had no wish to close the debate. He thought that Mr. Disraeli, from his position, ought to do so.

Lord Palmerston on the second night of the four days' debate made the finest speech of his whole career, a speech which changed sufficient votes to alter the result of the division. He spoke for nearly five hours, using no notes, but dealing in the greatest detail, with full command of date and incident, with the charges brought against him, and he ended with a peroration which cannot be too often quoted. The question the House had to decide was, he said, 'whether, as the Roman in days of old held himself free from indignity, when he could say *Civis Romanus sum*, so also a British subject, in whatever land he may be, shall feel confident that the watchful eye and the strong arm of England will protect him against injustice and wrong.'

Peel, speaking later in the debate, was generous in his praise of the speech. 'A most able speech,' he said, 'which made us all proud of the man who delivered it.' Probably the generous comment strengthened the effect of the powerful speech, and helped to give the Government the unexpected majority of forty-six.

Disraeli's closing speech, which Peel was heard to cheer, ended between three and four o'clock in the

morning of June 29, 1850. He was very tired, and his wife persuaded him to go for a drive with her in the afternoon. As they came back through Regent's Park a passer-by stopped the carriage, and told them that Sir Robert Peel had been thrown from his horse and carried home in a dangerous state. 'Dangerous,' said Disraeli; 'I hope not. His loss would be a great misfortune for this country.' His death four days later was a real misfortune for Disraeli himself. To him the result of the debate was not a disappointment, although he would have liked the majority to be smaller. He did not wish to defeat the Government, for the Conservative party was not ready to take office. Time was needed for completing the reunion which he knew Sir Robert Peel desired, and which the incidents of this debate had brought into immediate probability. Nor was he at all willing to face a General Election. If Lord John Russell were to resign, and the difficulty of forming a new administration proved insuperable, the Queen might, with reluctance, consent to a dissolution, and until the difference between him and Lord Stanley on the Corn Laws question were in some way arranged, it would be very dangerous to appeal to the constituencies.

There was another reason for his contentment with the result of the attack upon the Government. Lord Palmerston was the Minister specially assailed. But Lord Palmerston was, as he showed in later years, as sound a Conservative as Peel or Gladstone. Disraeli and he were, and always continued to be, on terms of pleasant personal friendship; and Disraeli was not without hope that the brilliant ability and trained experience of the elder statesman might be brought in to strengthen a Conservative Government. It was noted that Disraeli's speech in the Don Pacifico debate was very moderate in tone. Stanley had been afraid of this, and had written to Disraeli urging him to 'hit hard and not to spare.' The injunction

was unheeded. Palmerston said after the debate that Peel and Disraeli had 'treated him like gentlemen, which nobody else did.'

The Whig Ministry tottered on until February 13, 1851, when a motion by Disraeli calling upon them to introduce without delay measures to relieve agricultural distress was only rejected by a majority of 14. As in 1885 and 1895, a majority of 14 foreshadowed an arranged defeat, and seven days later only a handful of Liberals were brought to the House to resist a franchise motion which the Conservatives had assisted to reject in the previous session. Now the Conservatives took no part in the division, and the Government were beaten by 100 to 54; only 10 of the 54 being unofficial Liberals.

Russell resigned, and Lord Stanley, being sent for, made a half-hearted attempt to form a Conservative Ministry. There were comings and goings for a few days; the details are amusing, but not of enough importance to be recorded here.* But two matters must be mentioned. When Stanley told the Queen that he would try and form a Government, he said that he proposed that Disraeli should be Chancellor of the Exchequer and lead the House of Commons The Queen said that she had no good opinion of him. because of his conduct to Sir Robert Peel. But, she added, she would accept him on Lord Stanley's guarantee. Stanley applied to the Peelites to assist him, and invited Aberdeen, Goulburn, and Gladstone to take office. They all refused unless Protection was unequivocally relinquished. This Stanley would not hear of. Disraeli, unwilling to lose an opportunity which might not soon recur, was keen for adventuring a purely Conservative Ministry, but Stanley was less courageous, and Russell returned to office.

At the end of a not very interesting session Disraeli went to Hughenden, and addressed himself to the task of completing the book he had begun in the

* See Buckle's *Life of Disraeli*, iii. 288-295.

previous year as a monument to the memory of Lord George Bentinck. In a letter to Lord Henry Bentinck in August of 1850 he had explained the character of the work he was then projecting. 'I shall aim rather at a delineation of political character than at a formal biography, and I shall confine myself to the three years during which our lost friend took a leading part—three years which I find distinguished by three great subjects with which he identified himself. . . . I wish to make a popular book that all classes may read.'

Now he devoted himself with unstinted diligence to his congenial but difficult task. He wrote to his sister on October 4, 1851: 'I get on very well with my task; if I could only keep it up as well for two months I should see daylight.' On November 14 he told her: 'I have scarcely left my room, being so much occupied, though this delicious weather tempts me hard. From seven to two Hughenden looks like summer, but when I get out the owls are stirring.'

He did keep up for the two months, and on December 7 was able to send her the news, 'I finished the last line of the last chapter last night, and never in my life felt more relieved, not having had a moment's rest the whole autumn.'

Before the end of the year the work was published under the title of *Lord George Bentinck: A Political Biography.*

There is no other book of Disraeli's which deserves, and will so well reward, careful study. The political history of the three years is so skilfully told that even a summary of debates on fiscal questions ceases to be dull. The history would have been incomplete if the part which Disraeli himself took in the arduous conflict had been left wholly unrecorded, but his name is never introduced. Even when Lord George Bentinck's letters to him are quoted they are described as written 'to a friend,' and in the narrative 'a friend,' 'an individual,' 'one of his supporters,' 'one

who had not interfered in the discussion,' are the phrases by which Disraeli modestly endeavoured to conceal what was unquestionably the fact, that his counsel had directed, and his industry and courage had sustained, Bentinck in every crisis of the struggle. It would be idle to attempt by any quotations here to give example of the charm and value of the book. It contains wise teaching on political principles, and commercial policy, teaching which experience has shown to be sound, and which cannot safely be disregarded by statesmen of any country.

It was characteristic of Disraeli that he should insert in this volume an irrelevant chapter, probably written at a different date, upon the relations between the Jewish race and the other races inhabiting the different countries of Europe. It was true that the vote which Lord George Bentinck gave in favour of the admission of Jews to Parliament had cost him, as has been shown, his party leadership; but after a single sentence in the following chapter, in which Disraeli makes a feeble attempt to connect this subject with the main topic of the book, he says that the views of the intruded chapter were not those upon which Bentinck acted. There was no political or personal object to be gained by forcing this subject on the attention of those whom he desired to lead into Parliamentary power. So far from that, the great majority of his present followers felt that this was an obstacle to accepting his leadership; and John Manners and others remonstrated with him for needlessly provoking discussion. But Disraeli was resolved that in his person, and in others by his help, the race from which he sprang, and of which he was proud, should be relieved in England from the opprobrium and contempt which its people had endured, and should be freed from the civil disabilities which marked their inferiority to their fellow-subjects. He succeeded in this, succeeded fully and completely, and one reason of his success was the absolute fear-

lessness with which he took every opportunity of asserting the claims of the race to which he belonged. Thirty years later, when Henry de Worms spoke of his resolve to attack the seat which Gladstone then held at Greenwich, Disraeli said to him, 'Yes, go; and with the tenacity of our race you will succeed.'

If in this matter Disraeli risked offending some of his supporters, he unquestionably secured the attachment of some of the most prominent among them by the generous eulogy he gave to those who had stood by Lord George Bentinck in his Parliamentary struggle. He found phrases of apt and much prized compliment for the speakers in the long debates upon the Corn Laws.

'The well-digested speech' of Mr. Miles; 'the graceful rhetoric and flowing elocution' of Sir William Heathcote; 'the uncommon spirit and success' of Mr. Stafford; 'the doubly effective address' of the member 'who bore the great name of Baring'; 'the fortunate effusion of the maiden speech of Lord Brooke'; the 'Rhodian eloquence' of Mr. McCarthy —every one of these felicitous epithets sealed the allegiance of a useful follower; while the famous passage, so often quoted, in which he described the body of Conservatives who in 1846 turned against Sir Robert Peel and ejected him from office, has served from that day to this to give strength to traditional ties of party loyalty.

HUGHENDEN MANOR HOUSE.

By kind permission of Major Coningsby Disraeli of Hughenden.

To face p. 124.

BOOK IV

STATESMAN

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CHAPTER XV

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER

Lord George Bentinck : A Political Biography was still in the printer's hands when Lord Palmerston was roughly dismissed from office by Lord John Russell, the decision of the Cabinet being supported by the express wish of the Queen, who disliked him on personal grounds, and disapproved of his policy. She complained that Foreign Office dispatches were from time to time sent out without having been previously submitted for her approval, although in August, 1850, she had given definite instructions that this should not be done. Palmerston, who was sixty-five years of age, and had held office in Spencer-Percival's Ministry ten years before the Queen was born, and had been Foreign Secretary for fifteen years, chafed at having his dispatches edited and corrected by a young woman of little experience who was under the tutelage of Prince Albert and Baron Stockmar. The instructions given in August, 1850, were copied from a memorandum made by Stockmar five months earlier. Palmerston's grievance was that dispatches which required to be sent out at once, as they dealt with matters of urgency, were unduly delayed by the consideration given them at the palace. He promised obedience to the royal command, but was not scrupulous in observing it. In November he provoked the Queen's serious anger by his friendly attitude towards Kossuth, the Hungarian patriot, who was visiting England; and on hearing of Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* of December 2, he wrote to Count Walewski, the French Ambassador to England, expressing his entire approval of the change so

violently made. The natural result of his dismissal was that in the very early days of the session of 1852 he moved an instruction to the Government which he knew they could not accept, and by a majority of nine votes the Ministry was defeated. Before Disraeli left the House of Commons on the night of this division he wrote to Lord Derby (who had succeeded to the Earldom in June, 1851), and sent by special messenger to Badminton a letter without the insertion of which any biography of him would be incomplete.

[*Confidential.*] *Friday Night.*

Mackenzie will tell you the great event. Palmerston has defeated them by the militia when the regular troops failed. As you will have a good opportunity to think over your many difficulties in your journey up, I write this to beg that I may not add to them. Don't let me be in your way. It is everything for your Government that P. should be a member of it. His prestige in the House is very great, in the country considerable. He will not give you trouble about principles, but he may about *position*. He would not like to serve under me, whom he looks upon as a whipper-snapper. I am sufficiently repaid in having gained your confidence and not altogether disappointed our friends, and I beg, therefore, you will understand this.

Lord Derby's answer came early the next morning:

Whatever may be the issue of the present crisis, or the details of the arrangement consequent upon it, I shall never forget the generous self-sacrifice offered by the note which I received by Mackenzie at Badminton this morning.

The next day (Sunday) Lord Derby had a conversation with Disraeli, and later in the day had an audience of the Queen, and kissed hands on his acceptance of office as Prime Minister. Then he told the Queen, to her manifest dissatisfaction, that he intended to

offer the leadership of the House of Commons to Lord Palmerston. He went to Lord Palmerston and made the offer. It was refused. There was no want of cordiality or confidence on either side. Only one obstacle prevented the union which both desired. This was that Palmerston absolutely refused to join any Ministry which contemplated the possibility of any change or modification in the Free Trade measures. Lord Derby was equally firm, and the same cause which had prevented the accession of the Peelites just a year earlier now deprived the Conservatives of an ally whose presence in the new Government would have insured for it a popular welcome and an enduring life. The disappointment was great, but it caused no delay. By half-past two on Monday afternoon Lord Derby obtained the Queen's approval of his list of the chief members of the Ministry, and Disraeli's name was in that list as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Of the six members of the Cabinet who were his colleagues in the House of Commons, only one was a Privy Councillor; the others, like himself, had no official experience at all.

The Duke of Wellington had become so deaf that a chair was placed for him close to the table in the House of Lords, and when Lord Derby repeated to him the list of the new Ministers he kept saying, 'Who? Who?' as the unfamiliar names were spoken. So the 'Who? Who?' Ministry was the current jibe at the first of Lord Derby's Governments. But the new men soon proved their capacity for useful public service, and the administrative work of the Government was carried on without difficulty or friction. In legislation the only important measure brought forward was a Militia Bill for establishing an additional permanent force of 80,000 men for national defence at an annual cost of about £1,200,000. The House had reassembled on March 12, and on the 25th the Bill was introduced and read a first time without

a division. A month later, on the motion for the second reading, Lord John Russell somewhat unexpectedly announced that he would vote against it. Palmerston, delighted with the opportunity of defeating his old colleague, attacked him vigorously, and on a division at the end of a second night's debate the leader of the Opposition could only lead into the lobby 165 Liberals against 315 Conservatives, Peelites, and Whigs. The Bill soon passed into law.

A dissolution was now in immediate prospect; important proposals of legislation could not be dealt with in an expiring Parliament. The most important question of all was that of the financial policy of the new Government, and Disraeli found himself in a position of extraordinary difficulty. A Chancellor of the Exchequer who took office in February, and had to introduce a Budget in April, could have no influence on the estimates, and must accept those of the preceding Government or the permanent officials. There was also the special difficulty that the income tax, which brought in £5,000,000 a year, then a substantial item of revenue, had only been continued for the year which was now expiring on condition that the question of its permanent adoption should be considered by a Select Committee, and that committee, of which Disraeli was a member, had not yet reported; and behind these practical, but minor, difficulties there was the great question which must determine the future financial policy of the country, whether the idea of returning to protective duties on corn must be absolutely abandoned. Upon this question Derby and Disraeli were not agreed.

There was, of course, much excitement in the country, and when Disraeli rose to introduce the Budget on April 30 he spoke to a very crowded House. He proposed no change in taxation, and by continuing the income tax for one year he secured a modest surplus of £460,000. But although his proposals were simple, he prefaced them by a speech of

singular interest and importance. He laid down the principle that direct taxation should be as universal in its application as indirect, and he approved the suggestion that in levying income tax a difference should be made between earned incomes of a precarious character and those which arise from permanent possessions.

The speech was universally admired, and almost universally approved. And it brought to Disraeli his first letter from the Queen, who wrote that she had 'read with great interest the clear and able financial statement which the Chancellor of the Exchequer made in the House of Commons last night, and was glad to hear from him that it was well received.'

The General Election took place in July, with a result which Disraeli had apprehended. Lord Derby's obstinate refusal to acknowledge, as Disraeli wished to do, that the question of Free Trade in corn had been definitely decided by both Houses of Parliament, with the manifest approval of the country, had cost him the support of Graham in 1851, and of Palmerston when the present Ministry was formed. Now it confused and weakened the Conservative cause in all the constituencies. The writer of this book, then a boy of eleven, saw from a window in Rivers Street, Bath, the triumphant procession of the Liberal candidate with the large—very large—Liberal loaf on one pole and the little—very little—Tory loaf on the other. The experience of 1852 was repeated more than half a century later when the slogan of 'Your Food will Cost you More' shattered for a time the Conservative party.

The result of the polling was the return of 280 Conservatives, but of these only 220 could be confidently relied on.

The new Parliament met on November 11, and the exultant Radicals determined to humiliate the Ministry, if not at once to displace it. Charles Villiers gave notice of a resolution declaring that the

Act of 1846 was a wise, just, and beneficial measure. It was obvious that Ministers could not accept this, and that it was sure to be carried by a substantial majority. Palmerston came to the rescue. He proposed an amendment which did not contain these obnoxious words, but was in substance a declaration that a Free Trade policy was to be adopted. This Disraeli, to whom Palmerston had submitted the draft, was able to accept, and a very friendly and tactful speech from Palmerston, and the support in the lobby of all the Peelites, gave him a great majority against Villiers—336 to 256. Then Palmerston's amendment was carried by 468 to 53. The fifty-three were staunch Protectionists; there were seventy other Conservatives who accepted as final the decision of the electorate, but abstained from giving a distasteful and unnecessary vote. The great controversy was at last ended.

On December 3, 1852, Disraeli introduced his Budget. The framing of a satisfactory, if somewhat commonplace, Budget would not have been a difficult task, and Disraeli's position would not allow him to indulge in spectacular finance. He need not have proposed new taxation, and it might, indeed, have been possible to make some small remissions. But, unfortunately for him, the Queen was at this time in nervous anxiety at what she believed to be the inadequacy of the military and naval forces of the country. And the strong pressure which she brought to bear on the new Chancellor of the Exchequer could hardly be resisted by an inexperienced Minister without any assurance of Parliamentary support. The Queen sent for Disraeli, and in an interview with her and in long and repeated conversations with Prince Albert he was urged to provide for an increase of the defensive forces. He proposed to reduce the taxes upon tea and malt, to relieve the shipping interest by the reduction of lighthouse dues, and the sugar interest by giving permission to refine in bond for home con

sumption. The most interesting part of his speech related to the income tax. He did not alter the existing rate, but he introduced the new principle of making a distinction between precarious income—the earnings of trade, or professional and commercial employment, and the profits of farming—and the permanent and unearned income from realised property. He proposed that the earned incomes should bear only three-fourths of the rate of tax on income from property and investments, and in order to balance the reduction of public income which this would cause, he extended the tax to incomes of £100 a year of precarious income and £50 of permanent, and applied the tax to Ireland, which had been hitherto exempt. To meet the deficit these remissions would cause, and provide for the increased expenditure on naval and military defence, he proposed to double the house tax, and to lower the limit of exemption from that tax from £20 to £10.

Directly Lord Lansdowne heard of the proposal of increased taxation, he said he knew the Government would go out. Disraeli was only just recovering from an attack of influenza, but the five hours' speech in which he laid his proposals before the House was one of extraordinary clearness and completeness, and established once for all his authority as a great finance Minister. There was no question as to the ability with which he had stated and defended them. Nor, with the exception of Gladstone's casuistical objection to levying income tax on the dividends of Government securities, on the ground that the borrower thereby diminished the rate of interest which he had undertaken to pay, was there any serious attack upon his scheme of finance.

But it was not likely that a strong majority fresh from election successes would accept any Budget from their opponents. Disraeli made a gallant fight, and came nearer to success than could have been expected. At the end of three nights of rather violent

debate the Government was defeated by nineteen votes (305 to 286), and the next day, in a few modest sentences which contained an apologetic self-excuse for some bitter phrases which had disfigured his reply, he announced the resignation of the Government.

It was to him an hour of bitter disappointment. For five toilsome years he had been striving to rebuild the Conservative party, and ten months of official responsibility without any real political power was a poor return for his labour. But he bore the reverse with cheerful courage and philosophic patience. Short as had been the existence of this first Derby Ministry, some valuable results had followed the courageous experiment. His speeches in the Budget debate had established his authority on questions of national finance. And now he had round him a group of men who had held office together, and by that experience, short as its duration had been, were far more closely connected by party ties, and far better able to assist their leader in the daily work of Parliament.

To Disraeli himself the most important result was the change which these few months had made in the relations between him and the Sovereign. Queen Victoria's early suspicion and dislike had absolutely disappeared when she came to know him personally; Prince Albert and he were soon on a footing of mutual confidence and respect. And it can hardly be doubted that in later years the Queen remembered that the defeat of the Ministry in 1852 was largely due to the deference which he had then shown to their opinion and advice.

CHAPTER XVI

1852–1858: ABERDEEN AND PALMERSTON

The Aberdeen Government, which came into office in 1852, was said to be a Ministry of all the talents, but was a good illustration of the truth of Disraeli's saying in *Endymion* that 'all the elements of political power are useless without a commanding individual will.'

It was a Cabinet that is now remembered by Englishmen with neither gratitude nor respect. In the year 1854 the weakness of the Government led us into a wholly unnecessary war, and the mismanagement of the Government almost destroyed an English army. There is no division of opinion among Englishmen as to the merits of that Government. All Englishmen reproach it for the feebleness and incompetence which involved us in such heavy sacrifices.

In 1855 Russell's resignation under the threat of a vote of censure brought it to an end, and Lord Derby was again sent for. Again he invited Palmerston to join him, and on his refusal appealed to Gladstone, who had left the Aberdeen Ministry two years before. He was again refused, and to the mortification of Disraeli, who declared to a friend that 'our Ministry is prepared; a strong Government which will astonish the world,' he declined to take office.

Disraeli always looked upon this as a poor-spirited failure to seize a fine opportunity.

Lord Palmerston now became Prime Minister, and Lord Derby promised to give him a general support. The promise was kept, but in 1857 sudden and serious difficulties arose in China, where, without any declara-

tion of war, and for quite insufficient reason, the British fleet bombarded the town and harbour of Canton. A vote of censure was moved by Cobden, and in supporting it Disraeli made a speech in which, as in most of his speeches, he dealt rather with principles and causes than with incidents. One notable passage demands quotation, and is of permanent value:

> This country must dismiss from its mind the idea of dealing, as barbarous and uncivilised, with states with which Powers like ourselves have sympathies; and we must habituate ourselves to the idea of extending to countries like China the same diplomatic intercourse that we adopt with other nations. You cannot do that in a moment; it must be a work of time. . . . You are dealing with a country of immense antiquity. You have been reminded in the debate that China enjoys a civilisation of twenty-five centuries. In point of antiquity the civilisation of Europe is nothing to that. But the result of those ancient habits and customs is an existence of profound ceremony and formal etiquette; and yet you expect that such a country will not be startled by the frank, and occasionally, I am sorry to say, the brutal freedom of European manners. With a policy of combination with other powerful European states in attempting to influence the conduct of the Chinese by negotiations and treaties, it is my belief that ultimately, slowly, but surely, we may attain our end.

The Government was defeated by a majority of sixteen (263 to 247), which included Lord John Russell and some Liberals; Cobden and the group of Radicals; and Graham, Gladstone, and Sidney Herbert and other Peelites. Parliament was dissolved in March, 1857. The *Civis Romanus* cry was again effectively raised, and Palmerston came back to office with a commanding majority. The Radicals lost their leaders, for Cobden and Bright were defeated at the poll; Cardwell also was rejected, and the Peelite party practically disappeared.

Disraeli, whose courage never failed, declared himself not dissatisfied with this result.

To the correspondent who always received the earliest and the most candid account of his doings and feelings he wrote:

HUGHENDEN MANOR,
April 13, 1857.

I am by no means dissatisfied by the results of the General Election, strange and startling as they have been. They realise what I foretold: we shall now have a House of Commons with two parties and with definite opinions. All the sections, all the conceited individuals, who were what they styled themselves, 'independent,' have been swept away, erased, obliterated, expunged. The state of affairs will be much more wholesome, and more agreeable.

The Conservative party have got through the ordeal very well. Though numerically a little lessened, they are much more compact and united, and even as regards numbers, when a due occasion offers, will bring a larger force into the field than in the last Parliament. Although we had then 280 and more on the muster-roll, still, when the hour of battle arrived, we never could count on more than 220, the rest absent, or worse, against us. Now we have, I am assured by Sir William Jolliffe, the chief of my staff, 260 good men and true, fresh, and not jaded by the mortifying traditions of the last Parliament.

The due occasion referred to was not long in coming. Within ten months of the date of this letter a purely Conservative Government was in office, and Disraeli was again leading the House of Commons as Chancellor of the Exchequer. The first session of the new Parliament had not lasted a month when news came from India that a formidable rebellion had broken out, that an Emperor of India had been proclaimed at Delhi, and that at almost all the important military stations the native troops had mutinied.

Disraeli realised sooner than Lord Palmerston did the gravity of the crisis, and in a speech of great importance which he delivered in the House of Commons

on July 27, 1857, he dealt with the important and difficult questions which affect our relations with India. One passage is a counsel of wisdom which from the day of its utterance has had a great and growing influence upon our Indian policy.

I deny that, in a vulgar sense of the words, we have ever conquered India. . . . Our conquest of India in the main has been a conquest of India only in the same sense in which William of Orange conquered England. We have been called in—this happened very frequently in the earlier periods of our Indian history—by populations suffering under tyranny, and we have entered those kingdoms and principalities to protect their religion and their property. It will be found in that wonderful progress of human events which the formation of our Indian Empire presents that our occupation of any country has been preceded by a solemn proclamation, and concluded by a solemn treaty, in which we undertook to respect and maintain inviolate the rights and privileges, the laws and customs, the property and religion, of the people whose affairs we were about to administer. Such was the principle on which our Indian Empire was founded; and it is a proud as well as a politic passage in the history of Englishmen that that principle has been until of late years religiously observed.

Disraeli promised the Government the support of his party in every step necessary for the suppression of the rebellion, but he was shocked at the cry for ruthless vengeance on the rebels, which was soon ringing through England, and he made at a farmers' dinner in Buckinghamshire a noble protest against the methods of barbarism which have too often soiled the honour of a nation in arms.

The horrors of war need no stimulant. The horrors of a war carried on as the war in India is at present especially need no stimulant. I am persuaded that our soldiers and our sailors will exact a retribution which it may be, perhaps, too terrible to pause upon.

But I do, without the slightest hesitation, declare my humble disapprobation of persons in high authority announcing that on the standard of England 'vengeance' and not 'justice' should be inscribed . . . and for one protest against taking Nana Sahib as a model for the conduct of the British soldier. I protest against meeting atrocities by atrocities. I have heard things said and seen things written which would almost make me suppose that the religious opinions of the people of England had undergone some sudden change, and that, instead of bowing at the name of Jesus, we were preparing to revive the worship of Moloch.

By the end of the year British authority was re-established, and the Ministry addressed itself to the task of transferring the Government of India from the directors of the famous East India Company to the direct authority of the Crown.

Little progress had been made with this when an attempt to assassinate the Emperor and Empress of the French, plotted in England by a group of Italians, and carried out with bombs of English make, changed suddenly the course of English politics. There was not unnaturally an angry outburst in France. French Colonels sent violent addresses to the Emperor denouncing their perfidious ally, and Count Walewski, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, wrote a dispatch couched in offensive and even threatening terms. Palmerston was for once wanting in firmness. No fitting answer was made to the dispatch, and when Parliament met, a fortnight after the attempted crime, he gave notice of the introduction of a Bill to increase the punishment for conspiracy to murder. The proposal was, in itself, quite reasonable, and some years later the serious defect in our law was remedied.

The first reading of the Bill was resisted, but was carried by a majority of 200. But then came a violent reaction. Public opinion was very strongly expressed, and Russell saw an opportunity for revenge. Cobden and Bright desired to remedy the blunder they had committed five years before in ejecting Lord Derby

from office, a blunder they had ever since regretted, and a Radical proposed as amendment to the second reading a vote of censure on the Government for not having answered Walewski's dispatch before bringing in the Bill. On February 19, 1858, this was carried by a majority of 19 (234 to 215), and Palmerston at once resigned.

CHAPTER XVII

1858–59: AGAIN CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER

Lord Derby was sent for, and in a few days a strong Conservative Government was formed, and Disraeli was again Chancellor of the Exchequer. He had always been on very friendly relations with the Emperor of the French, and it cannot be doubted that this had great influence in promptly removing the difference which had arisen between the two countries. On the day that Parliament reassembled and the new Ministry presented itself to the House he was able to announce that Lord Malmesbury, the Foreign Minister, had answered Walewski's dispatch, and that the French Minister had replied in very friendly terms. The Emperor's intentions had, he said, been misunderstood, and the French Government would place its reliance purely and simply on the loyalty of the English people.

The legislative programme of the new Ministry was an India Bill in the present session, and a Reform Bill in the next. Disraeli, as was shown by the speech just quoted, had long and carefully studied the Indian question, and another passage of the same speech contained a clear and comprehensive statement of his policy. He said:

> The course which I recommend is this: You ought at once, whether you receive news of success or defeat, to tell the people of India that the relation between them and their real ruler and Sovereign, Queen Victoria, shall be drawn nearer. You must act upon the opinion of India on that subject immediately; and you can only act on the opinion of Eastern nations

through their imagination. You ought to have a Royal Commission sent by the Queen from this country to India immediately to inquire into the grievances of the various classes of the population. You ought to issue a Royal Proclamation to the people of India declaring that the Queen of England is a Sovereign who will respect their laws, their usages, their customs, and, above all, their religion. Do this, and do it not in a corner, but in a mode and manner which will attract universal attention and excite the general hope of Hindustan, and you will do as much as all your fleets and armies can achieve.

He now had the opportunity of taking the first step in drawing closer the relations between the Indian people and the Crown of England, and in Lord Ellenborough, who was made President of the Board of Control, he had a colleague of great ability and of unrivalled experience in Indian affairs. But the Bill prepared under the President's direction, and promptly introduced, was generally disapproved, and the Government was soon in danger of defeat or, at all events, of humiliation. Again the chronic jealousy of Palmerston and Russell had the often repeated result. Palmerston wished to defeat the Government Bill and revive his own. Russell determined to disappoint Palmerston, and schemed to take the lead on this subject to himself by asking the House to substitute for the Ministerial proposals resolutions which he would propose, and on which legislation should be founded. Disraeli dexterously defeated them both. He accepted the plan of proceeding by resolutions, and undertook to introduce them himself. This was done. The Government resolutions were introduced, and with slight modifications carried, and a sound measure, much simpler than that at first proposed by Ellenborough, was soon passed into law.

A month after this escape the Government was again in danger. The Indian rebellion had been suppressed, and Canning had issued a proclamation which

appeared to Ellenborough and Derby and Disraeli to be confiscatory and vindictive. Ellenborough drafted a dispatch to Canning couched in terms of severe censure, and this dispatch, not laid before the Cabinet, but seen and approved by the Prime Minister and Disraeli and two of their colleagues, was sent to Canning. No harm would have been done had not Ellenborough taken the unusual and very injudicious step of sending copies to Lord Granville, and still more unwisely to John Bright. This acted as a challenge, and in both Houses notice was given of a vote of censure. Ellenborough promptly resigned, but this sacrifice did not satisfy the Opposition, and on May 14 the vote of censure came on for debate. In the House of Lords the spokesman, craftily chosen by Palmerston, was Lord Shaftesbury. His motion was defeated, but only by a majority of nine.

In the House of Commons the position of the Ministry seemed almost hopeless. That there would be a majority, and probably a large majority, against them was assumed by all, except the undaunted Disraeli. The question about which all were anxious was whether, in the event of a Government defeat, the Queen would grant a dissolution. Disraeli was untiring in indirect negotiation with Graham, and Derby, at his suggestion, opened communications with Lord Aberdeen. It was to Aberdeen that the Queen, anxious to retain the Ministry, but reluctant to dissolve a Parliament only one year old, applied for advice. The result was that on May 16 the Queen 'allowed Lord Derby to know that a dissolution would not be refused to him, and trusted that her honour would be safe in his hands.' The knowledge gradually spreading that the defeat of the Government would bring about an immediate dissolution had great effect, and on the morning of the 21st, Disraeli had a letter from Cardwell asking to be allowed to withdraw his resolution. To this he would not consent. Although space cannot be found in this

volume for many extracts from the reports sent nightly by Disraeli to the Queen, his account of the closing scene of this debate cannot be omitted.

HOUSE OF COMMONS,
May 21, 1858.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, with his humble duty to your Majesty.

The fullest House; it is said 620 members present; it was supposed we should have divided at three o'clock in the morning. Mr. Gladstone was to have spoken for the Government at half-past ten—very great excitement—when there occurred a scene perhaps unprecedented in Parliament.

One after another, perhaps twenty members, on the Opposition benches, rising and entreating Mr. Cardwell to withdraw his resolution. After some time, silence on the Government benches; Mr. Cardwell went to Lord John Russell, then to Lord Palmerston, then to Lord John Russell again, then returned to Lord Palmerston and retired with him.

What are called the interpellations continued, when suddenly Lord Palmerston reappeared, embarrassed, with a faint smile, addressed the House, and, after various preluding, announced the withdrawal of the vote of censure. A various debate followed, the Chancellor of the Exchequer endeavouring, as far as regards Lord Canning, to fulfil your Majesty's wishes. It is impossible to estimate the importance of this unforeseen event to your Majesty's servants. It has strengthened them more than the most decided division in their favour, for it has revealed complete anarchy in the ranks of their opponents. With prudence and vigilance all must now go right.

The short speech in which Disraeli consented to the withdrawal of the motion was a model of dignity and good taste. The vigour of the debate and the probable result of the division had excited the public mind, and for the first time in his life he was cheered by the crowds in the streets as he walked to and from the House. His feeling of triumph had been severely repressed in the moment of success, but in a speech

a few days later, at a farmers' dinner at Slough, it found expression in an unforgettable passage.

There is nothing like that last Friday evening in the history of the House of Commons. We came down expecting to divide at four o'clock in the morning, and I myself, with my armour buckled on, prepared to address them, perhaps, for two hours after midnight; and believe me, gentlemen, even with the consciousness of a good cause, that is no vain effort. We were all assembled. Our benches, with their serried ranks, seemed to rival those of our proud opponents, when there arose a wail of distress, but not from us. What ensued I can only liken to that mutiny of the Bengal army with which we are all so familiar. Regiment after regiment, corps after corps, General after General, all acknowledged that they could not 'march through Coventry' with Her Majesty's Opposition. Gentlemen, it was, I may say, rather like a convulsion of nature than one of the ordinary transactions of human life. I can liken it only to one of those earthquakes in Calabria or Peru of which we sometimes read. There was a rumbling murmur, a groan, a shriek, distant thunder; and nobody knew whether it came from the top or the bottom of the House. There was a rent, a fissure in the ground. Then a village disappeared. Then a tall tower toppled down; and then the whole of the Opposition benches became one great dissolving view of anarchy.

Perhaps the most interesting incident in Disraeli's life in 1858 was his renewed and again self-sacrificing attempt to secure Gladstone's permanent inclusion in the Conservative party. His mind was too noble for personal jealousy of the man who, five years younger than he, but with all the advantages of name and race, and early associations, and University education, and influential friends—advantages, the lack of which had made his own career so difficult—had become twenty-four years earlier a member of Peel's Ministry. His ever-dominant thought was how he could strengthen the political party, the success of whose principles was, in his belief, essential to the

greatness of England and the happiness of her people. Gladstone had never disavowed his early political faith. It was as a Conservative that he had been returned for Oxford University without opposition at the election of 1857. In important divisions he had voted against Palmerston's Liberal Government. In the hour of danger which had just passed his relations with the Derby Ministry were such that it had been arranged that he should be their spokesman at the most important hour of the most important night of the debate. Four days later (on the very day of the speech at Slough) Disraeli wrote him a letter which, notwithstanding its length, cannot be properly omitted from this biography. It should be read and reread and carefully considered in all its aspects by anyone who desires to realise the greatness of Disraeli's character.

[*Confidential.*] GROSVENOR GATE,
May 25, 1858.

I think it of such paramount importance to the public interests that you should assume at this time a commanding position in the administration of affairs that I feel it a solemn duty to lay before you some facts that you may not decide under a misapprehension. Our mutual relations have formed the great difficulty in accomplishing a result which I have always anxiously desired. Listen without prejudice to this brief narrative.

In 1850, when the balanced state of parties in the House of Commons indicated the future, I endeavoured, through the medium of the late Lord Londonderry, and for some time not without hope, to induce Sir James Graham to accept the post of leader of the Conservative party, which I thought would remove all difficulties. When he finally declined this office, I endeavoured to throw the game into your hands, and your conduct then, however unintentional, assisted me in my views.

The precipitate Ministry of 1852 baffled all this. Could we have postponed it another year, all might have been right. Nevertheless, notwithstanding my having been forced publicly into the chief place in

the Commons, and all that occurred in consequence, I was still constant to my purpose, and in 1855 suggested that the leadership of the House should be offered to Lord Palmerston, entirely with the view of consulting your feelings and facilitating your position.

Some short time back, when the power of dissolution was certain, and the consequences of it such as, in my opinion, would be highly favourable to the Conservative party, I again confidentially sought Sir James Graham, and implored him to avail himself of the favourable conjuncture, accept the post of leader in the House of Commons, and allow both of us to serve under him.

He was more than kind to me, and fully entered into the state of affairs, but he told me his course was run, and that he had not strength or spirit for such an enterprise.

Thus you see, for more than eight years, instead of thrusting myself into the foremost place, I have been at all times actively prepared to make every sacrifice of self for the public good, which I have ever thought identical with your accepting office in a Conservative Government.

Don't you think the time has come when you might be magnanimous ? Mr. Canning was superior to Lord Castlereagh in capacity, in acquirements, in eloquence, but he joined Lord Castlereagh when Lord Castlereagh was Lord Liverpool's lieutenant, when the state of the Tory party rendered it necessary. That was an enduring and, on the whole, not an unsatisfactory connection, and it certainly terminated very gloriously for Mr. Canning.

I may be removed from the scene, or I may wish to be removed from the scene.

Every man performs his office, and there is a Power, greater than ourselves, that disposes of all this.

The conjuncture is very critical, and, if prudently yet boldly managed, may rally this country. To be inactive now is, on your part, a great responsibility. If you join Lord Derby's Cabinet, you will meet there some warm personal friends; all its members are your admirers. You may place me in neither category, but in that, I assure you, you have ever been sadly

mistaken. The vacant post is, at this season, the most commanding in the Commonwealth; if it were not, whatever office you filled, your shining qualities would always render you supreme; and if party necessities retain me formally in the chief post, the sincere and delicate respect which I should always offer you, and the unbounded confidence which on my part, if you choose, you could command, would prevent your feeling my position as anything but a form. Think of all this in a kindly spirit. These are hurried lines, but they are heartfelt. I was in the country yesterday, and must return there to-day for a county dinner. My direction is Langley Park, Slough. But on Wednesday I shall be in town.

B. Disraeli.

This letter needs no comment; only a few words of explanation. But it is sufficient to account for the statement which Lord Morley made to the writer of this book that the further he advanced with his biography of Gladstone the more highly did he think of Disraeli.

The vacant post offered to Gladstone was the new office of Secretary of State for India. The reference to Mr. Canning is immediately followed by the remarkable sentence: 'I may be removed from the scene, or I may wish to be removed from the scene.' It is not improbable that the 'removal from the scene' of which Disraeli spoke was the possibility of his going to India as Governor-General. But for the suicide of Lord Castlereagh Mr. Canning would probably have filled that great office. And Disraeli's personal inclinations, and the state of his finances, then as always in a very troublesome condition, would have explained his willingness to be relieved for a time from the incessant toil which had been his portion for twelve years. Gladstone's reply was cold and evasive, but was followed by a definite refusal. He soon after accepted from Lord Derby the appointment of High Commissioner to the Ionian Islands, and spent six months there preparing a new

constitution for the administration of the islands. At his own suggestion he was appointed Lord High Commissioner in order to bring it into operation, but the islanders refused to accept it, and his mission having failed, he returned to England in May, 1859.

By the end of the session of 1858 the first of the two measures proposed by Lord Derby, the India Bill, had been successfully carried through. Young Lord Stanley, who had now become one of Disraeli's closest and most friendly colleagues, took the place which Gladstone had refused, and soon brought a new and useful activity into the management of Indian affairs. He disturbed the old officials of the Company by appearing punctually at Leadenhall Street at ten in the morning, and often staying until seven or eight at night. And presently he disturbed them still more by offering eight clerkships for open public competition, and having 400 candidates examined at Willis's Rooms. The experiment was very expensive, and it was not repeated.

Now came the subject of Parliamentary reform.

In the session of 1859 Disraeli, after great difficulty in inducing his colleagues to agree to any scheme, introduced a Reform Bill into the House of Commons.

No good purpose would be served by discussing in this volume the details, and the Parliamentary fortunes, of the proposals made by Disraeli in 1859, by Lord John Russell in 1860, or by Gladstone in 1866. In fact, the scuffle upon reform, for it hardly deserved to be called a conflict, which went on in those years has now very little interest. It hindered the legislative work and weakened the authority of Parliament. The Whigs, under Lord John Russell, the Radicals, led by Cobden and Bright, and later, the Liberals under Gladstone, desired to keep in their own hands this very useful method of maintaining their party predominance.

If from time to time they could, by slightly lowering the electoral qualification, add considerable numbers

of voters to every constituency, they might reasonably hope that these new voters would show their gratitude to the party which had obtained this privilege for them. As to the redistribution of seats required to redress the injustice to the agricultural interests which was found in the existing system, and would be aggravated by a simple enlargement of the electorate, they were always prudently reticent.

Disraeli, on the other hand, maintained the right and duty of the Conservative party to take an equal share with their opponents in dealing with the distribution of political power, and one of his great anxieties was that Parliament might be rendered a truer exponent of public opinion by the transfer to the counties, which were now palpably under-represented, of a substantial number of seats belonging to small boroughs with, in some cases, ridiculously small constituencies.

Disraeli's Reform Bill was introduced on February 28, 1859, and on March 3 the second reading was defeated by a majority of thirty-nine (330 to 291) upon an amendment moved by Russell, and supported by Palmerston and his followers, and by the whole group of Radicals headed by Cobden and Bright.

A dissolution followed. The Conservatives gained nearly thirty seats, but this was not quite sufficient, and on June 10 a vote of want of confidence moved by Lord Hartington, who now took the first important step in his long and honourable career of political activity, was carried by the fateful number of thirteen (323 to 310), and the Government at once resigned.

In the division of June 10 Gladstone had voted with the Conservatives against Hartington's motion, but a week later he accepted the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Government which was formed by Palmerston, under whom Lord John Russell had agreed to serve as Foreign Minister.

Disraeli had made great efforts to avert this defeat, and almost to the last moment believed they would

be successful. He bore the disappointment with his accustomed serenity. He had, indeed, good reason to be satisfied with the record of these seventeen months of Conservative administration. And in the closing passages of his speech on the night of the fatal division he spoke with just complacency of their legislative output.

There was a passage in this speech which well deserves to be remembered and studied. It is of special interest at a time when in three countries of Europe democracy has taken the strange form of a self-appointed autocrat, who in two of them uses the apparatus of Monarchy as the instrument of his rule.

I have no apprehension myself that, if you had manhood suffrage to-morrow, the honest, brave, and good-natured people of England would resort to pillage, incendiarism, and massacre. Who expects that? For though I would do as much justice to the qualities of our countrymen as any gentleman in this House, though I may not indulge in high-flown and far-fetched expressions with respect to them like those we have listened to—for the people may have their parasites as well as monarchs and aristocracies—yet I have no doubt that, whatever may be their high qualities, our countrymen are subject to the same political laws that affect the condition of all other communities and nations. If you establish a democracy, you must in due season reap the fruits of a democracy. You will in due season have great impatience of the public burdens combined in due season with great increase of the public expenditure. You will in due season reap the fruits of such united influence. You will in due season have wars entered into from passion, and not from reason; and you will in due season submit to peace ignominiously sought and ignominiously obtained, which will diminish your authority and perhaps endanger your independence. You will in due season with a democracy find that your property is less valuable, and that your freedom is less complete. I doubt not, when there has been realised a sufficient quantity of disaffection

and dismay, the good sense of this country will come to the rally, and that you will obtain some remedy for your grievances, and some redress for your wrongs, by the process through which alone it can be obtained —by that process which may render your property more secure, but which will not render your liberty more eminent.

Disraeli's own position in the country had been greatly strengthened by his success as a finance Minister and his brilliant leadership of the House of Commons. Just a month after the change of Government a great banquet was given to the late Ministry at the headquarters of the city of London Conservatism, the noble hall of the Merchant Taylors' Company. He used the opportunity well.

August and September were spent at Hughenden, where he was for some weeks prostrated by a severe attack of the illness which assailed him more or less severely at this season of every year. But in October he and Mrs. Disraeli were guests at Knowsley, and Lord Derby and he at a brilliant banquet at Liverpool made speeches of much importance. Then in the fine Free Trade Hall at Manchester he delivered an address on popular education to an enthusiastic audience of five or six thousand persons. With his own party his authority was steadily growing. Although among its undistinguished members there was always an undercurrent of dissatisfaction and even of personal dislike, every year that passed saw the admission to his friendship of the ablest of younger men among his followers, an admission which was inevitably followed by their admiring devotion to him.

The Radicals soon had reason to regret their vote. In 1852 they had helped to overthrow Lord Derby's Ministry, and in 1855 Cobden had declared that he looked back with regret on the vote he then gave, for the result of that division had cost the country one hundred millions of treasure and between thirty and forty thousand good lives. Now they repeated

their blunder. They had displaced Disraeli, but they had incidentally delayed the passing of a Reform Bill for nine years, and had thus secured for him the credit of passing, in a form unacceptable to them, the measure over which they had schemed and wrangled for so many years. In 1860 Lord John Russell for form's sake introduced a Reform Bill. Lord Palmerston, who at seventy-four years of age became Prime Minister of a Government which lasted six years—longer than any Ministry since the Reform Bill of 1832—was known to dislike the proposal. The Bill was allowed a gentle debate and a quiet disappearance, and the next year Lord John Russell was made a peer, and no more was heard of any Government proposal of Parliamentary reform during the remainder of Lord Palmerston's life.

CHAPTER XVIII

1859-1866: A PATRIOTIC OPPOSITION

When Palmerston formed the Government of 1859, he was promised by Derby and Disraeli a general support. This greatly assisted the Prime Minister in carrying on the ordinary business of the House of Commons. In fact, the attitude of the Conservative party during the whole of the Parliament was rather that of friendly neutrality than of active hostility. The Government could not properly be called a Liberal Government. It was a composite administration controlled by Palmerston, and Palmerston had been truly described nine years before in a paper which Disraeli influenced as 'a gay old Tory of the older school, disguising himself as a Liberal and hoaxing the Reform Club.' And in these circumstances Disraeli was right in saying 'for the present we are more useful and powerful in Opposition than on the Ministerial bench.'

The leaders of the Radical group were greatly mortified by the practical abandonment of Parliamentary reform, and in the early part of 1861 Cobden and Bright made a curious offer to Disraeli that, if the Conservatives would join them in turning out the Government, they should have two years of office. The offer was rejected, and Lord Palmerston was informed that it had been made and refused, and that the Conservative leaders had no desire to come into office at present, and had no intention of taking any step to turn the present Government out.

Of course, there were occasions when a clear difference of opinion upon a subject of importance provoked a serious debate and division; and in the six years of this Ministry there were five occasions on which

Palmerston had a majority of fewer than twenty-five. But it was only by bringing into the lobbies from time to time the full strength of the Conservative forces that Disraeli could prevent disappointment and discontent among his own followers, and could exercise a constant pressure on the Government to secure the great objects of his own policy—economy in administration at home, and a firm but peaceful attitude in foreign affairs. As he said to his confidential correspondent, 'You cannot keep a large army in order without letting them sometimes smell gunpowder.' In the same letter he said, 'I did what I could to mitigate the humiliation of my troops.' There was a notable instance of his skill in doing this of which the writer of this book was an admiring witness in May, 1861. A motion to amend Gladstone's Budget by reducing the duty on tea was defeated after vigorous debate and in a crowded House by a majority of eighteen. There was the disturbance and tumult of cheering which always follows a vital division. But a sudden hush came when Disraeli was seen standing at the table. He said: 'After the majority which has just been declared—if, indeed, that can be called a majority which is still in its teens —I move that the House do now adjourn.' The Conservatives went away laughing and cheering as if they were the victors.

During the whole course of the Palmerston Ministry the main subject of concern, and occasionally of keen anxiety, in the minds of English statesmen in or out of office was their relations with foreign nations. Almost every year saw a fresh disturbance of European peace; while across the Atlantic the attempted secession of the Southern States of the Union at one time threatened to involve this country in a fratricidal war.

In 1860 the Italian Revolution, in 1861–62 the American Civil War, in 1863 the partition of Poland, in 1864 the seizure by Germany of the Danish provinces

of Schleswig and Holstein, successively excited public feeling in this country and overtaxed the ability of our diplomacy. The cession of Savoy and Nice to France, as the price of her assistance in re-uniting the rest of Italy, revived the suspicions and hostility of 1859. And the three principal members of the Government each made a somewhat serious contribution to the danger. Gladstone prematurely declared that Jefferson Davies had made a nation of the Southern States; Russell, by clumsy dispatches to Russia, provoked a well-merited, but none the less painful, rebuff; and Palmerston declared in the House of Commons that if Germany attacked Denmark 'it would not be Denmark alone with which they would have to contend'; and then had to say that, failing the help of France and Russia, England could not act alone. Through all these troubles Disraeli worked steadily in the cause of peace. In the debate on the address in 1860 he stated very clearly his principles of foreign policy.

I do not know any member of this House—either among my colleagues or among those who sit on the other side of the House—who has ever maintained the monstrous proposition that England ought never under any circumstances to interfere in the affairs of foreign states. There are conditions under which it may be our imperative duty to interfere. We may clearly interfere in the affairs of foreign countries when the interests or the honour of England are at stake, or when in our opinion the independence of Europe is menaced. But a great responsibility devolves upon that Minister who has to decide when those conditions have arisen. . . . The general principle that we ought not to interfere in the affairs of foreign nations unless there is a clear necessity, and that, generally speaking, it ought to be held a political dogma that the people of other countries should settle their own affairs without the intervention of foreign influence or foreign power, is one which, I think, the House does not only accept, but, I trust, will cordially agree to.

In each of the four cases just enumerated, and especially in the most dangerous of all, the civil war in America, Disraeli's speeches and his influence over the members of his party gave great help to a calm and consistent policy of peace, and the last of them, the Schleswig-Holstein annexation, had ceased to be a danger by the middle of the year 1864. A vote of censure on the Government for their conduct of foreign affairs was then proposed in both Houses of Parliament. In the Lords it was carried; but in the House of Commons an evasive amendment, moved by Kinglake, was accepted by Palmerston, and was preferred by a majority of nineteen.

Palmerston in his cheerful old age—he was born in 1784—continued his popular and powerful Ministry. He cared little for the bitter complaints of the Radicals. The situation was pleasantly illustrated in August, 1862, when Cobden, smarting under the contemptuous rejection of his overtures to the Conservative leaders and the indifference of Palmerston (who knew of the making and the refusal of these), made a vigorous attack upon the Ministry.

The Radical leader arranged his attack under three heads—Non-intervention, Retrenchment, and Reform—and arraigned the Prime Minister as being unfaithful to these principles of the Liberal party. Palmerston's speech was a delightful specimen of his breezy style. He scoffed at Cobden's solemn declaration that posterity would condemn his conduct, and declared he did not care about posterity if the House of Commons supported him. But in trying to follow Cobden's topics he used the long-established Liberal phrase of 'Peace, Retrenchment, and Reform.' Sir George Grey, who was sitting next to him, spoke to him and reminded him of 'Non-intervention.' This gave four headings instead of three, and Palmerston was annoyed, and rather testily said, 'Oh, Peace, Non-intervention, and so on.'

Disraeli rose later, and in his pleasantest style

bantered the Liberal party on their disappointments; and talking of 'the broken vows of the ball-room,' and the alleged unfaithfulness of the Prime Minister to Liberal principles, he slipped in, as if inadvertently, 'though, by the way, he does not seem to know what those principles are.' A young listener in the reporters' gallery, who on this Thursday evening was there rather as a student of the art of debate than as a professional reporter, wondered if that was the only notice that would be taken of the Prime Minister's slip. An hour later, when the full attack had been developed, in a fine, sonorous voice the tones rang out, 'and now he has forgotten the watchwords of his party, and stumbles when he tries to repeat the credo of their faith.' The practical limit of a seven years' Parliament was reached in August, 1865, and the result of the General Election was deeply disappointing to Disraeli. Only two or three seats were won, and at last the courage which had carried him through so many disasters seemed to fail. He wrote to Lord Derby on August 6 once more offering to resign to another the leadership of the Conservative party in the House of Commons. This, as we have seen, he had several times proposed. But the language he now used reads strangely when one remembers the success he had already achieved, and the splendour of his later triumphs. He spoke of himself as 'in the decline of life.' He said, 'I am quite aware that I have had an opportunity in life to which I have not been adequate,' and he added, 'I look upon my career in the House of Commons, so far as office is concerned, to have ended'; and his letter contained the mournful sentence, 'The leadership of hopeless Opposition is a gloomy affair, and there is little distinction when your course is not associated with the possibility of future power.'

The suggestion that he made in this letter was that Lord Derby should form an anti-revolutionary Government on a broad basis, with a Whig leader of the

lower House. Lord Derby, in a very able letter, full of generous recognition of the ability, faithfulness, and perseverance with which for seventeen years Disraeli had supported him, absolutely repudiated the idea. When these letters were written, Lord Palmerston, in gay and bustling health, was preparing to meet the new Parliament, of whose loyalty to his leadership the result of the election had given him full assurance. Two months later his unexpected—almost sudden—death changed the whole course of English politics. Russell became Prime Minister, and Gladstone, ' unmuzzled,' as he called it, by being rejected at Oxford (in favour of Gathorne Hardy), and now member for an industrial constituency in Lancashire, led the House of Commons. Directly the new Parliament met the Parliamentary reform scuffle was renewed, and the majority in number, who in 1859 had been returned to support Lord Palmerston, began to resolve itself into discordant sections. The session of 1866 was really a comic episode in a confused and not a very dignified drama.

In March Gladstone introduced what might be called a moderate Reform Bill, lowering the franchise, but not dealing with redistribution. Nobody on the Government side liked the Bill very much. Bright—leading ninety Radicals—said it did not go far enough; Lord Grosvenor and the Whigs, about fifty in number, said it went too far; Lowe and some forty Liberals objected to any reform at all. After a full-dress debate, which lasted for more than a Parliamentary fortnight, the second reading was only carried by a majority of five (318 to 313), thirty Liberals voting with the Opposition. The narrow escape compelled the Ministers to produce their Redistribution Bill, which, by threatening some of the newly elected members with the extinction of their constituencies, sent a few more votes into the Opposition lobby. The committee stage began on June 7, both Bills being taken together. Disraeli was in his element.

Definitely Conservative amendments had to be proposed to keep his own forces together, and they were defeated by small but sufficient majorities. But his great hope was in the Whigs, and he was indefatigable in his endeavours to keep them in full agreement with his plans. Success rewarded him. On June 18 an amendment moved by Lord Dunkellin, a Whig, son of Lord Clanricarde, that rating and not rental should be the qualification for the franchise, was carried by a majority of eleven (315 to 304), after a declaration by Gladstone that this would be fatal to the Bill. Ten days later Lord Derby had been sent for, and was busy forming his Ministry. The most amusing incident of the comedy was that the Whigs held meetings at Lord Elcho's house, and decided that the proper result of the division would be that Derby and Disraeli should both be superseded, that Lord Clarendon should be Prime Minister, and Lord Stanley leader in the House of Commons. What should become of the displaced leaders they did not say. Only a very dull man, such as Earl Grosvenor, would have put such a suggestion into writing.

CHAPTER XIX

1866–67: CHANCELLOR AND PRIME MINISTER

The third Derby Government was much stronger than either of its forerunners. Three new and very notable names appeared in the list of the Cabinet—Robert Cecil (now, by his elder brother's death, become Lord Cranborne), Stafford Northcote, and Gathorne Hardy; and Sir Hugh Cairns, one of Disraeli's most valued supporters, now advanced to the post of Attorney-General. The House of Commons reassembled on July 16, 1866, and sat for a month of unimportant business. Outside the House there was a good deal of unrest and disturbance. The violent debates which had ended in the Liberal defeat had aroused strong passions; there were tumultuous demonstrations in the Northern towns, and while the House was sitting in the later days of July a riotous mob broke down the railings of Hyde Park in assertion of a right to hold reform meetings in the royal Parks, and the soldiery had to be called out. The Queen was much alarmed, and pressed upon Lord Derby her conviction that if the question of reform were not taken up in earnest by the Government with a view to its speedy settlement, very serious consequences might ensue.

She offered to make a personal appeal to Russell and Gladstone to meet Ministers fairly in an honest endeavour to find terms of agreement. The offer was not accepted, and Disraeli's comment upon it in a letter to Stafford Northcote was shrewd and characteristic.

The royal project of generous interposition with our rivals is a mere phantom. It pleases the vanity of a Court deprived of substantial power, but we know

from the experience of similar sentimental schemes that there is nothing practical in it, or, rather, that the only practical result is to convey to our rivals that we are at the same time feeble and perplexed.

The two Conservative leaders hesitated for some time as to the course to be taken. Their difficulties were great. In the House of Commons there was a party majority of seventy against them; and they could not be sure of their own followers. It had not been very difficult for Disraeli, when once assured of the steadfastness of his friends in the enemy's camp, to rally his own forces in full strength to support their revolt. But it was quite a different task to induce them now to support proposals which could not possibly obtain acceptance unless they added very considerable numbers to the electoral body.

At first there was some thought of a possible postponement, and suggestions were made of resolutions so drawn that legislation founded upon them need not be undertaken until the following year, or that a Royal Commission should be appointed to consider the question of boundaries, which would have the same result. But it was soon seen that this would not do. The Queen, the House, and the people, were all agreed that the matter must be dealt with at once.

In January of 1867 Derby and Disraeli decided that resolutions should be introduced, to be followed by immediate legislation, and that a limited household suffrage founded on rating, with safeguards in provisions for length of residence and plural voting, must be the basis of their proposal.

It was not without difficulty that the Cabinet was brought to agree to this scheme. The resolutions were so watered down in order to prevent the resignation of General Peel that they were too vague to be of any value. But no time was lost. Parliament met on February 5, and on the 11th Disraeli introduced the resolutions, reserving any statement as

to the measures to be founded upon them until he should move their adoption on Monday the 25th.

On Tuesday the 19th the Cabinet accepted the full scheme, and Disraeli was authorised to place it before the House when he moved the resolutions. It was arranged that a meeting of the party should be held at Downing Street at half-past two on the 25th, when Lord Derby would commend to his followers the proposals which would be explained by Disraeli in the House of Commons two hours later.

A final meeting of the Cabinet took place on Saturday the 23rd. All the members were present. The great scheme (as Disraeli called it) was again considered, and unanimously approved, and Disraeli prepared himself for its exposition on the Monday afternoon.

At eight o'clock on the Monday morning Derby received a long letter from Cranborne saying that he refused to support the scheme; that he had no alternative to propose; and that Carnarvon agreed with him. At half-past one the other members of the Cabinet met. Something must be proposed. To announce at Downing Street and in Parliament that the Ministry had broken up would be ruinous. There was no time for consideration. So it was decided that a Bill should be put forward somewhat on the lines of Gladstone's defeated measure, but with rateable value instead of rental as the basis of the suffrage.

And at Downing Street and in the House of Commons the leaders in serious tones described these futile proposals.

There was an immediate outburst of anger and ridicule from every side. Tories, Radicals, Whigs, and Liberals all joined in protesting that to introduce such a Bill would only revive the fruitless controversies of the past, and gave no hope of any permanent settlement. Derby and Disraeli were delighted. The Ten Minutes Bill, as it was con-

temptuously called, had really saved the situation. Cranborne, Carnarvon, and Peel were allowed to go, and their places promptly filled; the resolutions were withdrawn, and on March 18 Disraeli, representing a united Cabinet, introduced the great scheme. A week later the second reading debate was closed by Disraeli in one of the finest speeches he ever delivered, and the Bill was read a second time without a division. Gladstone had furiously assailed it at its introduction and in the debate, but he had lost his hold on his party, and received a very clear intimation that they did not mean the Bill to be wrecked.

On April 8 it went into committee. When Thring (afterwards Lord Thring) was called in to draft the Bill, Disraeli had insisted that it should be so drawn that the first division in committee should be upon the question of rating or rental as the basis of the suffrage.

Bright, Lowe, and Cranborne were now on the same side and voting against the Government, but Disraeli again made a great effort, and the division gave him a majority of twenty-one (310 to 289).

Again Disraeli was cheered by crowds in the streets, and he had an enthusiastic welcome at the Carlton Club.

The House now adjourned over Easter, and it was not until May 9 that the discussions in committee were resumed. They need not be discussed here. They occupied thirty days, with frequent divisions. Many of these were upon quite trivial amendments, but there were twenty-three in which more than two hundred members voted, and in eighteen of these Disraeli was in the majority. During all these long nights of debate Disraeli hardly left his seat in the House, and Thring was always in attendance at his private room to advise as to changes in drafting which the decisions might render necessary.

The responsibility was great, the strain very severe. But it was fully rewarded when, on July 15, the Bill

was read a third time without a division. It became law on August 15.

The passing of the measure was received with satisfaction by the country, and with enthusiasm by the Conservatives, although Lord Cranborne persisted in declaring that the party had been deceived and betrayed. Lord Derby had a fine reception at Manchester, and Disraeli went to Edinburgh, and there received the freedom of the city, and an honorary degree from the University, and was entertained at a banquet at which he delivered a memorable speech upon the history, and the issue, of the reform controversy; and he was enthusiastically cheered at a crowded public meeting of working men. This visit to Scotland was a fine and effective political demonstration, but it put too heavy a strain upon himself and Mrs. Disraeli. The last four months of this year were full of anxieties and troubles. On September 10 Lord Derby wrote to him to say that he was suffering from one of the severest and most painful attacks of gout that he had had for years. And he went on to say: 'If the increasing frequency of these attacks is to continue, I feel that the time cannot be far distant when I must seek for restoration to health in absolute withdrawal from the public service.'

In October Disraeli himself was disabled by an unusually severe attack of his annual illness. He wrote to Lord Derby on October 18: 'I never can escape. Luckily, my attack is as regular as the trade winds, and occurs at a time when it little signifies, and can be kept secret. Unfortunately, this year I have something to do—the Edinburgh banquet. How I am to get there I know not, but I feel I shall. I think of troops that have marched thirty miles, and then, on empty stomachs too, have to fight. They do fight, and often conquer.' He went to Edinburgh, and did unquestionably conquer.

Early in November he came back to London. Lord Derby was still lying ill at Knowsley, and preparation

had to be made for the opening of Parliament on the 19th of that month. A few days after their return Mrs. Disraeli was taken ill, and rapidly grew worse. Lord Stanley presided in Disraeli's place at the Ministerial dinner on the eve of the session, and on the morning of the 19th the doctors said that there was no hope of her recovery. Happily, a few hours later there was a definite change for the better, and Disraeli was able to appear in the House. But before the end of the month he succumbed to an attack of gout, and for a fortnight could only write little letters in pencil to his colleagues, or to his wife who lay ill in another room. It was nearly the end of December before they had both quite recovered.

After voting a sum of money for the cost of a military expedition which it had been found necessary to send from India to Abyssinia, Parliament adjourned to February 13, 1868. Before that date a remarkable and unprecedented incident had occurred. In the middle of January the Queen summoned Disraeli to Osborne, and there informed him by a message, which, curiously enough, was delivered to him by General Grey, who had been his successful opponent at the election at High Wycombe in 1832, that she intended to make him her First Minister in the event of Lord Derby's resignation. Then he had an audience which lasted for an hour, and, as he reported to his wife, the Queen 'spoke of everything without reserve or formality.' The personal relations between the Sovereign and Disraeli had completely changed since the day, sixteen years before, when she had reluctantly consented to his admission to Cabinet office. The deference he had then shown to her wishes, and the unfortunate consequence, had not been forgotten. That short period of office had been sufficient to establish a friendship between him and the Prince Consort. Each recognised in the other a man of high education, of sound judgement, and of upright purpose, and they became often associated

in schemes of public usefulness. During the short administration of 1858–59 and the two years which followed Disraeli was several times invited to stay at Windsor. When that administration ended, the Queen was desirous of conferring upon him some public honour, but did not press it upon his reluctance.

Upon the death of Prince Albert in 1861, the tribute which Disraeli rendered in the House of Commons to his ability, and to the diligence and skill with which he had carried forward the undertakings with which he was associated, brought from the Queen, through Lord Derby, a grateful message, which was followed by the gift of portraits of herself and the Prince. And in 1863, when the Prince of Wales was married, it was by the special instructions of the Queen that seats were reserved for Mr. and Mrs. Disraeli in St. George's Chapel. A little later Disraeli was invited to dine and sleep at Windsor, and there had a prolonged interview, of which he told his wife that it was more like the audience between a Sovereign and a Minister, so frankly did she speak to him on political subjects. Soon after this she sent him a copy of the volume of the Prince Consort's speeches, bound in white morocco, containing an inscription in her own handwriting. With it came a letter from herself, expressing her gratification at the tribute which he had paid in the course of a speech in the House of Commons 'to her adored, beloved, and great husband.' Thus was established a close personal friendship between the Sovereign and the statesman which, so long as they both lived, continued unbroken, to the honour and enjoyment of both, and to the advantage of the nation they loved and served.

Just a month after the visit to Osborne Lord Derby, who was still lying ill at Knowsley, sent in his resignation, and on February 28, 1868, Disraeli kissed hands at Osborne on becoming Prime Minister.

CHAPTER XX

HEALTH, FINANCE AND FRIENDSHIP

The attainment by Disraeli of the high office which he had told Lord Melbourne thirty years earlier was the goal of his ambition seems a good opportunity to pause in the chronological record of his political activities, and complete the story of his life during this toilsome ascent by a chapter relating to conditions and incidents of his private life which could not conveniently be scattered over the more formal narrative.

In estimating the courage and strength of character which carried him through so many difficulties, it must never be forgotten that throughout these strenuous years he was haunted by the mysterious illness which had attacked him in 1829, and had then for three years disabled him for intellectual work, and had caused his father to rent Bradenham that he might there have the complete repose which seemed the only cure for his disease. From time to time this trouble recurred. He often collapsed at the end of the session in July or August, and every year at the fall of the leaf he fell into a condition of weakness and depression which for ten days or a fortnight made him incapable of mental effort of any kind. The time was always spent at Hughenden, where he strolled about the grounds, and where the peace and beauty of his much-loved home gradually restored his energy. In a letter to Lady Londonderry, written from Hughenden on August 21, 1854, he tells her of the regularity and the character of these attacks. He says:

I have been here ten days, and should have earlier advised you of my removal, had not that happened to me which has happened every year for the last

quarter of a century, and which, every year, always takes me by surprise—namely, that, though I left town quite well, I had not been here forty-eight hours before I found myself in a complete state of nervous prostration, and quite unable to write the shortest letter on the most ordinary business. I suppose it is the sudden cessation of excitements too complete and abrupt for our mortal frames; but, whatever the cause, the result is undoubted and most distressing.

In one year, 1856, Disraeli and his wife went to Spa. The attack that year was very severe, and under his doctor's orders he went through a course of medical treatment there which lasted a month. He experienced the greatest benefit from the waters and mineral baths, and returned to England quite renovated. The visit to Spa was not repeated, but seems to have had some lasting good effect. The attack of gout which has been mentioned in the last chapter was the first of a long series, and the time came when the pain of gout was felt almost as a relief when it displaced the more grievous suffering of asthma.

Disraeli's attacks of illness were periodic, and in the intervals his health was strong and his nerves were steady; but he had another trouble which was constant and urgent, but which never seems to have affected his nerves or his high spirits. That was the plague of want of money. When he married he owed nearly £30,000. Mrs. Disraeli had an income for life of £4,000 or £5,000 a year, and had property of her own which was sufficient to pay off the larger part of these debts, and was used for that purpose.

During the first nine years of their married life Disraeli made substantial sums by his novels—*Coningsby*, *Sybil*, and *Tancred*—but the purchase of Hughenden in 1848 brought him again under a heavy load of debt. His father had made the contract to purchase, and had found £10,000 towards the amount required, which came eventually, with the cost of redecoration and furnishing, to nearly £40,000. Isaac

D'Israeli died before the transaction was completed, and Disraeli as his residuary legatee received about £11,000, but £25,000 had to be raised by a mortgage, the money being lent by the Duke of Portland. The payment of interest on this and other loans must have been a matter of difficulty, and in May, 1853, he added to his responsibilities by starting a weekly paper called *The Press*. The enterprise had but a moderate success. Disraeli was a diligent contributor, and Bulwer Lytton wrote a brilliant series of *Letters to Manilius*. The circulation, sold or given away, gradually rose until at the end of six months it reached 2,500. But the considerable sum of money which had been raised to meet the initial expense of its production had by that time been exhausted, and the income expected from advertisements was not obtained. In October Lord Stanley wrote to Disraeli in a very serious tone. 'This, then, is our position: Present deficiency; probable but not certain solvency at the end of a few months, so far as paying our way, but no prospect of getting back from the profits of the paper any portion of the original outlay; funds exhausted; resources from subscriptions nearly at an end; and yourself, as I understand, responsible for the deficit.' Disraeli would never admit defeat, and in March, 1854, he wrote to Lord Bath a characteristic letter claiming that from the political point of view the paper had been a success, but adding that there was, 'and must be for some time, a loss upon its production.' Much of this loss he had to bear, and in the following August there was an unusual touch of depression in a letter he wrote to Lady Londonderry. He complained: 'I already feel, in the position I now occupy, the want of sufficient fortune. There are a thousand things which ought to be done which are elements of power, and which I am obliged to decline doing or to do at great sacrifice. Whether it be influence with the Press, or organisation throughout the country, everyone comes to me, and every-

thing is expected of me.' The newspaper struggle was continued, and the financial troubles gradually grew less onerous; but Disraeli had difficulties with some of the contributors, and he must have been relieved when, on again becoming a Minister of the Crown in 1858, he felt bound to sever his connection with the paper. At the close of that short-lived administration he accepted the pension of £2,000 a year, and at fifty-four years of age found himself, for the first time in his life, in the enjoyment of a personal and assured income.

The year 1853, which had seen the beginning of that laborious and burdensome newspaper undertaking, became a year of pleasant memory, for its later months saw the commencement of a remarkable friendship which for ten years brought much pleasure into the lives of Disraeli and his wife, and eventually gave substantial relief to the financial troubles which were always pressing upon him, and which were seriously increased when in 1857 the Duke of Portland, who had succeeded to the Dukedom three years before, suddenly took it into his head to call in the Hughenden mortgage. Disraeli went to the money lenders, and borrowed from them on terms which for some years brought back upon him the pressure and anxiety of earlier years.

The friendship just referred to had a very singular beginning. He was, of course, like all men who are conspicuous in public affairs, the constant recipient of letters from all sorts of correspondents, known or unknown to him. Before the year 1851 he had occasionally received letters from Torquay commenting on some speech that he had made or containing compliment or criticism on one of his books. They were written in a large, bold hand, without the usual commencement or ending, and were signed T. Bridges Willyams. He knew nothing of the writer, and left the letters unanswered. But in the spring of 1851 he received one which could not be disregarded. It gave

no information as to the age, or sex, or social position of the writer, but said: 'I am about to make my will, and I have to ask, as a great favour, that you will oblige me by being one of the executors. . . . I think it right to add that, whoever are my executors will also be my residuary legatees, and that the interest they will take under my will, although not a considerable one, will, at all events, be substantial.'

Disraeli consulted his solicitor and valued friend, Sir Philip Rose, and after some inquiries had been made, which ascertained that the writer was a widow lady of advanced age and substantial fortune, he wrote to her, giving no definite acceptance of the executorship, but not refusing, and suggesting that she should consult some local solicitor of high standing with reference to the will which she desired to make. There was an exchange of presents. Mrs. Bridges Willyams sent Disraeli a complete edition of the works of Sir Thomas Browne; he in return sent her the newly published *Tancred*, and a copy of the new edition of his father's *Curiosities of Literature*. In acknowledging the receipt of these books the old lady made the quaint suggestion that, as she was coming to stay a few days in London, he should appoint a time and place to meet her at the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park. Disraeli was at Hughenden and did not come to town to meet her, and they do not appear to have met anywhere until August, 1853, when the Disraelis went to stay for a week at the Royal Hotel, Torquay, and a note was sent to her to say that they would call on her at Mount Braddon. During the two years that had passed since the proposal to meet at the Crystal Palace some letters had been exchanged, but it was not until after this visit to Torquay, when both Disraeli and his wife had made personal acquaintance with her, that the correspondence began which shows how close and sincere their attachment was to this remarkable woman. The industry of Disraeli and her scrupulous care to

preserve every scrap of his writing have given to Disraeli's biographer very valuable material, and the extracts from letters which have been quoted in this book without the name of the recipient being stated are all taken from the constant, frank, and self-revealing correspondence in which he for ten years made Mrs. Bridges Willyams the sharer of his hopes and fears, his triumphs, and his disappointments. During these ten years he and his wife paid an annual visit to Torquay. They never stayed at Mount Braddon, nor did their friend ever come to see them in London or at Hughenden, though often invited. There was, however, through all these years an almost incessant interchange of letters and presents. Mrs. Bridges Willyams sent finely bound books and costly china, roses from her garden, and cuttings of special plants, and, very frequently, turbot, soles, lobsters, and prawns, from the Brixham waters. Disraeli in return sent to her venison and grouse which had come to him from Scotland or the moors, and trout from the Hughenden lake, with letters full of the joy of life and friendship. In the third volume of the great biography this episode in Disraeli's life is described by Mr. Buckle in a delightful chapter illustrated by adequate extracts from these letters. Only a careful perusal of that chapter will enable the reader to fully appreciate the charm which never failed to capture those with whom Disraeli came in close personal relations. It was the charm of one gifted, in conversation or in correspondence, with the subtlest knowledge of character and the most delicate grace of expression. These extracts cannot be reproduced here, but room must be found for a single example.

On September 1, 1862, he wrote:

I am quite myself again, and, as I have been drinking your magic beverage for a week and intend to pursue it, you may fairly claim all the glory of my recovery—as a fairy cures a knight after a tournament or a battle. I have a great weakness for mutton

broth, especially with that magic sprinkle which you did not forget. I shall call you in future, after an old legend and a modern poem, 'The Lady of Shalotts.' I think the water of which it was made would have satisfied *even you*. For it was taken every day from our stream, which rises among the chalk hills, glitters in the sun over a very pretty cascade, and then spreads and sparkles into a little lake, in which is a natural island. Since I wrote to you last we have launched in this lake two beautiful cygnets, to whom we have given the names of Hero and Leander. They are a source to us of unceasing interest and amusement. They are very handsome and very large, though as yet dove-coloured. I can no longer write to you of Cabinet Councils or Parliamentary struggles: here I see nothing but trees and books, so you must not despise this news of my swans.

In November, 1863, Disraeli heard that his friend had been suddenly taken ill, and he hurried down to Torquay, but was too late to see her alive. By a will executed in 1857 she had left to him the whole of her residuary estate 'in testimony of my affection and of my approbation and admiration of his efforts to vindicate the race of Israel, with my views respecting which he is acquainted, and which I have no doubt he will endeavour to accomplish.' She was herself of Jewish parentage, a descendant of the famous family of Da Costa, but she, like Disraeli, had accepted the Christian faith. The confidence expressed in this will was justified in her lifetime. In the following year Disraeli, as Chancellor of the Exchequer and leader of the House of Commons, succeeded in achieving the result for which he had so courageously struggled, and saw his friend, Baron Lionel de Rothschild, the Liberal member for the City of London, take his seat in the House.

Under the will of Mrs. Bridges Willyams Disraeli received a sum of £30,000, a very welcome relief, for his debts had grown to a formidable and seriously embarrassing amount.

About the same time a wealthy Conservative, one Andrew Montagu, offered to take over all outstanding debts on a mortgage of Hughenden at the low rate of 3 per cent. Ten per cent. or more was the interest then being paid, or added at usurious rates of interest to the debt already dangerously large. The mortgage was for no less a sum than £57,000, and by this unlooked-for generosity of one on whom he had no personal claim of kindred or friendship Disraeli's annual liability was relieved by about £5,000. Montagu's generosity did not stop here. In 1873 he reduced the interest to 2 per cent. From that time Disraeli had no further financial troubles. His wife's death in that year deprived him of the home at Gloucester Gate which they had shared so long, for in that property she had only a life estate, but he earned large sums by the novels *Lothair* and *Endymion*, and from 1874 to 1880 was in receipt of an official income of £5,000 a year. He lived quietly, and bought more land at Hughenden, and invested in consols, and when he died the mortgage was paid off out of the estate of £84,000.

This chapter, supplemental to the record which has been previously given of Disraeli's political progress, may fitly include a reference to the piece of good fortune which came to him in 1866 in his acquirement of the services of Montagu Corry as his private secretary. In the previous year he had been staying at Raby, and one day he heard singing and laughter in one of the rooms. Looking in, he saw a very good-looking young man dancing and singing for the amusement of a group of young people. He said something pleasant to the performer, but thought little of the incident. But when in June, 1866, he was busy with the formation of Lord Derby's third administration, he received a modest letter from Montagu Corry, the son of a member of Parliament who had sat for Tyrone for no less than forty years, and had been a junior Lord of the Treasury

in Sir Robert Peel's Government from 1841 to 1845:

It is with much hesitation that I write to you, and only your kindness to me when I met you at Raby last autumn induces me to do so. I have for three years been practising as a barrister, and am now most anxious to get a start in political life; and though I can scarcely presume to ask for the honour of being private secretary to yourself, yet I do venture to hope that, should you know of some member of the Government to whom my services might be acceptable, you would be willing to mention me as one most desirous to serve in that capacity, and to give all my time and energies to the Conservative cause.

The offer of service was gladly accepted, and a fortnight after the date of this letter Corry took up his duties at Downing Street as Disraeli's private secretary. Thenceforward, for fourteen years he rendered to his chief, in office or out of office, a constant and invaluable service.

CHAPTER XXI

PRIME MINISTER—PLACE WITHOUT POWER

On March 5, 1868, crowds gathered in Parliament Street and round Westminster Hall and cheered the new Prime Minister as he walked from Downing Street to the House of Commons. In the chamber itself the enthusiastic welcome of the Conservatives to the leader of their party was swelled by generous cheers from the ranks of his opponents. With a few ill-natured and bitter exceptions all were ready to do honour to the great qualities of intellect and courage and patience which had marked thirty strenuous years of Parliamentary life. It was for him an hour of justifiable pride. But it was not the fulfilment of his ambition. He cared little for place, however high, unless it brought him power, and this was not yet obtained. He had to face in this House of Commons a majority of sixty or seventy. In the reform conflict he had divided, and out-manœuvred, and defeated them. But it was certain that the quarrels and jealousies of that struggle would soon be composed, and he would once more find himself subject to the embarrassment and mortification of having to carry on the administrative and legislative work of Parliament when an appeal to the division lobby might at any moment show that the real authority was in the hands of his opponents. Nor could he feel any confidence in a Conservative victory at the General Election, which the necessity of passing the Scotch and Irish Reform Bills and bringing a new register into operation must postpone for a year.

During the long struggle which had now been brought to a close powerful Reform Leagues and

Associations had been formed, and throughout the country people had become accustomed to great gatherings of working men, who, as supporters of the Liberal leaders, had clamoured for the franchise. It was not likely that when they, for the first time, enjoyed the privilege of the vote they would use it in favour of the Conservative party. The onerous task which lay immediately before him was to complete the legislative business of Parliamentary reform, and to carry forward as best he could certain measures which he was anxious to pass. One measure, the planning and discussing of which had occupied much time and thought for several months before Lord Derby's resignation, was a Bill for the establishment of a Roman Catholic University in Dublin. Disraeli was always in favour of concurrent endowment, but that was clearly impracticable. Lord Derby and a majority of the Cabinet would have opposed it on principle, and neither the House of Commons nor the constituencies would have accepted it. The details of the proposed measure were discussed by him with Cardinal Manning, who had lately been appointed Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, and who represented quite truly that he was acting with the full authority of the Papacy and the Irish Bishops. The plan he accepted and approved was that a charter should be granted to the proposed University, the governing body being a senate in which there should be a strong lay element, the first Chancellor being also a layman. There would not be any immediate state endowment, but the establishment charges should be paid out of public funds. The scheme was outlined in the House of Commons in a speech by Lord Mayo, the Irish Secretary, on March 10, and was not unfavourably received. But six days later, in a debate upon a private member's motion on Irish affairs, Gladstone, who had now, upon Lord Russell's retirement, become the leader of the Liberal party, declared that the Church in Ireland must cease to

exist as a state Church. This changed the whole situation. The Irish Bishops threw over Manning, and demanded that Cardinal Cullen should be the Chancellor, and that the Bishops should have the whole government of the University in their hands, and have a veto upon the books to be used, and upon the first appointments of professors and teachers and other officers. This, of course, as they well knew, could not be accepted. Manning's last letter to Disraeli was written on the very day of Gladstone's declaration, and his friendly attentions were now naturally transferred to the Liberal leader, who had given notice of three resolutions declaring that the Church in Ireland should be disestablished and disendowed, that the further creation of vested interests in it should be arrested, and that the Queen should be asked to place her interests in the temporalities of the Church at the disposal of Parliament. Matters now went on rapidly. There were two long debates—one upon the motion to go into committee, and one upon the first resolution. When on the night of April 30 that resolution was carried by a majority of 65 (330 to 265), Disraeli at once went to Osborne, and, in pursuance of a decision taken by the Cabinet a few days earlier, advised the Queen to dissolve the Parliament as soon as the public interests would permit, adding that an earnest endeavour would be made by the Government to insure that the appeal should be made to the new constituencies. He added that if Her Majesty thought the public interest would be best consulted by the immediate retirement of the present Ministry, they would at once resign. The Queen refused to accept resignation, and sanctioned a dissolution, saying in a letter to Disraeli that she could not think of accepting the proffered resignation until the opinion of the country should have been taken on a question which it was admitted on all hands could not be settled in the present Parliament. When Disraeli appeared in the House of Commons

and announced that the Ministry would continue in office, and that they would expedite public business so that a dissolution might take place in November, a furious storm broke out. The Liberal leaders had confidently expected that after so serious a defeat the Ministers would at once resign, and that they would come into office and enjoy for a twelvemonth power, and patronage, and the full control of the legislation required for the completion of the reform settlement, and would then go to a General Election with full assurance of an overwhelming victory and a long lease of power. In their disappointment they assailed the Prime Minister with unmeasured violence. Mr Bright described him as behaving 'in a manner at once pompous and servile,' and charged him with having put the Sovereign in the front of a great struggle, saying that 'the Minister who does this is guilty of a very high crime and a great misdemeanour against his Sovereign and his country.' Disraeli's immediate reply was superb in its severity and its self-command. It brought to an end the pleasant personal relations which had theretofore existed between him and his assailant.

I shall not condescend to notice at length the observations of the hon. member for Birmingham. He says that when it was my duty to make a communication to the House of the greatest importance, and which I certainly wished to make, as I hope I did make it, in a manner not unbecoming the occasion, I was at once pompous and servile. Well, Sir, if it suits the heat of party acrimony to impute such qualities to me, any gentleman can do so; but I am in the memory and in the feeling of gentlemen on both sides of the House—and fortunately there are gentlemen on both sides of this House; they will judge of the accuracy of this representation of my conduct. It is to their feeling and to their sentiment on both sides of the House that I must appeal, and no words of mine, if the charge be true, can vindicate me. The hon. gentleman says he will make no charge against me; and then he makes insinuations which,

if he believes them, he ought to bring forth boldly as charges. I defy the hon. member for Birmingham, notwithstanding his stale invective, to come down to the House and substantiate any charge of the kind which he has presumed only to insinuate. Let him prefer those charges; I will meet him, and I will appeal to the verdict only of gentlemen who sit on the same side of the House as himself.

Bright's friendly biographer, who says that Parliamentary veterans called that week 'Passion Week,' makes the mild remark that 'Bright was in no position to prove in public his insinuations that Disraeli had been influencing the Queen against Irish disestablishment. Therefore he had better have said nothing about it.'

The fact was that Disraeli had again out-manœuvred his opponents. Violently attacked by Gladstone, he challenged him to propose a vote of want of confidence. Of course, the challenge was not accepted. The carrying of such a vote would have meant an immediate appeal to the old electorate, the result of which would have been very doubtful, and would have settled nothing but the question of office, and another election by the new constituencies in a few months. No Parliamentary leader could face the unpopularity of such a proposal.

So Disraeli, strengthened by a collective pledge, signed, at the suggestion of the Duke of Richmond, by all the members of the Cabinet, that they would stand by any advice which he might give the Queen upon the great question of the date of dissolution, went quietly forward with the necessary work of the session, and found time for other useful legislation.

The second and third of Gladstone's resolutions were allowed to pass without opposition, and the Queen was advised to place her temporalities of the Irish Church at the disposal of Parliament. Now, in order to give effect to the second resolution preventing the creation of new vested interests, it was necessary

that Gladstone should bring in a Suspensory Bill. This went through the House with little delay, as Disraeli well knew that it would be rejected by the Lords. This they did by a majority of two to one. At the end of May Lord Derby was able to write to Disraeli ' to congratulate him on being master of the position for the remainder of the session.'

At the end of June the necessary legislation had been completed, and Parliament was prorogued with a view to a dissolution in November.

Disraeli had reason to be well satisfied with the work of the session. Not only had the five measures which were needed for completing the reform legislation and making an early election possible been carried into law, but useful Bills had been passed relating to schools, and railways, and British sea fisheries, and for the taking over by the state of the telegraph service, then in the hands of private companies, and for amendments in civil and criminal procedure in Scotland. More important than any of these was the transfer to a judicial tribunal of the trial of election petitions, the erratic treatment of which by committees of the House of Commons had encouraged rather than checked the corruption they were intended to prevent.

Nor was it only in this valuable output from a singularly turbulent and difficult session that the Government had deserved the approbation of the country. The expedition to Abyssinia, promptly dispatched, and ably organised and commanded, had resulted in a brilliant military success, and the recovery of the prisoners. And a convention was arranged with a special representative of the United States for a friendly arbitration upon the American claims in respect of their losses caused by the failure of Lord John Russell to prevent the departure of the armed *Alabama* from an English port. It is not surprising that the Conservative leaders began to look forward with some confidence to a favourable result of the coming elec-

tion. Disraeli had taken the arrangements for the contest out of the hands of Mr. Spofforth, the partner of Sir Philip Rose, and before the close of the session had entrusted them to 'a limited but influential committee of gentlemen,' the most zealous and active of whom was Lord Nevill, afterwards the Earl of Abergavenny. This committee, when they had made their survey of all the constituencies, reported to the Prime Minister that the probable result of the election would be the return of 330 Conservatives, and with this prospect he was, of course, content. There was no real foundation for their encouraging prediction. At that time the party organisation on both sides was in a very rudimentary condition.

Until 1867 no practical step was taken to create a central organisation which should be in constant touch with the Conservative Associations which existed in some, but by no means all, of the borough constituencies. There were a few county associations, but they were of no great value. In November, 1867, the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations was established at a conference of the delegates from seventy associations held at the Freemason's Tavern, and on the same day, at a dinner at the Crystal Palace at which Lord John Manners presided, a letter from Disraeli was read. He wrote: 'None are so interested in maintaining the institutions of the country as the working classes. The rich and the powerful will not find much difficulty under any circumstances in maintaining their rights, but the privileges of the people can only be defended and secured by national institutions.'

The first local meeting to which the National Union sent a speaker was that of the York Conservative Association on January 8, 1868, and extracts from his speech were published as the first pamphlet of the Union. The speaker, then a member of the Council of the Union, was himself a candidate at a somewhat

notable election twelve years later. Thus, the foundation was laid of the great political organisation which, under Disraeli's watchful control, was the chief agency in securing for him six years afterwards a return to the office of Prime Minister with a majority in both Houses of Parliament which gave him power as well as place. But in this contest it was quite ineffective. Speakers were sent out and many meetings held, and in Lancashire Lord Derby had fostered an organisation which achieved great results; but so great an increase in the electorate as resulted from the passing of the Reform Bill had not been expected or prepared for, and the Conservatives suffered an overwhelming defeat. They had, indeed, some remarkable successes. Gladstone and Hartington were both defeated in Lancashire, and the Liberal leader had to content himself, during the whole existence of the Ministry he was now called upon to form, with being junior member for the metropolitan borough of Greenwich. Roebuck, Horsman, Milner Gibson, and Bernal Osborne, lost their seats; and Lowe returned as the representative of London University, to which Disraeli's Bill had given a member, 'the only constituency,' said Disraeli, 'which would have elected him.' Even more remarkable was the fact that the more violent of the reform agitators—Edmund Beales, Ernest Jones, and others of that type—all failed to obtain seats. Westminster and Middlesex were the most important of Conservative gains, for they brought to Disraeli the sound judgement and business capacity of W. H. Smith, and the delightful personality and brilliant gifts of Lord George Hamilton. But, as has been said, the defeat was overwhelming, and when the polls were ended the Liberal majority had been almost doubled, and was now 112. Disraeli called the Cabinet together, and a valuable precedent was set by their acceptance of his advice that they should resign at once, instead of waiting for the assembling of Parliament and the inevitable passing

of a hostile vote. The resignation was accepted, and on December 1 Mr. Gladstone was summoned to Windsor.

A few days earlier Disraeli had sent to the Queen a memorandum in which at Her Majesty's desire he put into writing what had passed in audience as to the position of the Conservative party after the election, and his personal relations to it. A few passages from this memorandum, and one from the Queen's reply, will, it is hoped, conclude this chapter as gracefully as the incident closed his activities as Prime Minister.

It had been the original intention of Mr. Disraeli on the termination of this Ministry to have closed his political career, and to have humbly solicited your Majesty to have bestowed on him some mark of your Majesty's favor, not altogether unusual under the circumstances. . . . Mr. Disraeli might say that at his time of life and with the present prospects, it is a dreary career again to lead and form an Opposition party; but he does not say so, because, in truth, if in that post he could really serve your Majesty and your Majesty really felt that, it would be a sufficient object and excitement in public life, and he should be quite content even if he were never Minister again. But next to your Majesty there is one to whom he owes everything, and who has looked forward to this period of their long united lives as one of comparative repose and of recognised honor. Might Mr. Disraeli, therefore, after thirty-one years of Parliamentary toil, and after having served your Majesty on more than one occasion, if not with prolonged success, at least with unfaltering devotion, humbly solicit your Majesty to grant those honors to his wife which perhaps under ordinary circumstances your Majesty would have deigned to bestow on him?

It would be an entire reward to him, and would give spirit and cheerfulness to the remainder of his public life, when he should be quite content to be your Majesty's servant, if not your Majesty's Minister.

The Queen's reply:

The Queen has received Mr. Disraeli's letter, and has much pleasure in complying with his request that she should confer a peerage upon Mrs. Disraeli as a mark of her sense of his services. The Queen thinks that Mr. Disraeli, from whom she will part with much regret, can render her most useful service even when not in office, and she would have been very sorry if he had insisted on retiring from public life. The Queen can indeed truly sympathise with his devotion to Mrs. Disraeli, who in her turn is so deeply attached to him, and she hopes that they may yet enjoy many years of happiness together.

The Queen will gladly confer the title of Viscountess Beaconsfield on Mrs. Disraeli.

CHAPTER XXII

1869–1871: 'LOTHAIR'

At the end of the year 1868 Disraeli went to Hughenden, relieved for a time from the daily toil and anxiety of a political leader. It was clear that the proposal to disestablish and partially disendow the Church in Ireland would obtain in the House of Commons so large a majority that the Lords, even if the Conservative peers were agreed in resisting it, could not hope to do more than delay their acceptance, and secure a generous treatment in matters of finance. So Disraeli spent the month of January in quiet retirement from public business. But he was not idle. In the middle of the month he wrote to Lord Stanley: 'I have realised perfect solitude, but I have found enough to do.' What that work was no one but his wife knew. Until, a year later, Longman announced the coming publication of *Lothair*, even Montagu Corry was not allowed to know that his chief had gone back to the literary work which he appeared to have abandoned twenty years before After the great strain of the last two years the tired politician wanted rest and mental refreshment, and just after he left office a publisher, whose name is not revealed, offered him £10,000 for a work of fiction. Disraeli is reported to have once said to a friend, 'If I want to read a new novel I write one,' and although the offer was refused, it may have come at the time when the idea of writing a story which should have nothing to do with English politics appeared to be a pleasant, and perhaps a very profitable, task.

During the two years of the late Government there had been events in Italy of dramatic interest. The

adventure of Garibaldi, and his defeat at Mentana by the French troops, who returned to Rome to protect the Papacy, and the preparations made in Rome and by its Bishops in all parts of the world for the holding of the Ecumenical Council which was to add another dogma to the necessary beliefs of a Christian, were tempting subjects for a novelist. In England there had been Fenian conspiracies; and in the social, as distinguished from the political, world the persevering, and for a short time the notably successful, efforts of Cardinal Manning and Monsignor Capel to make proselytes in aristocratic circles, and the special case of the young Marquis of Bute, who was supposed to entertain the two inconsistent intentions of proposing marriage with one of the beautiful daughters of the Duke or Abercorn, and of seeking admission to the Roman Church, were topics of constant interest. Almost on the day that Disraeli retired to Hughenden Lord Bute's solution of the problem was announced. These were the topics which, to the absolute exclusion of the chapters on political events which made *Sybil* and *Tancred* valuable as history, were discussed in the finest of Disraeli's novels.

While Disraeli was writing the early chapters of *Lothair* the new Prime Minister was working hard at the preparation of the Irish Church measure which he introduced on March 1. It was enthusiastically received by a majority which was somewhat curiously composed. Gladstone, writing to a friend in January, says: 'Our three *corps d'armée*, I may almost say, have been Scotch Presbyterians, English and Welsh Nonconformists, and Irish Roman Catholics.'*

A very strange force to be following a leader who for twenty-one years had been the High Church member for the University of Oxford.

The Bill provided for the immediate disestablishment and disendowment of the Church in Ireland

* Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, ii., 259.

and the application of the surplus of the Church endowments, after providing compensation for existing interests, to the relief of 'unavoidable calamity and suffering.' The words sound strangely ironical when one remembers that this sum of £9,000,000 was afterwards chiefly used as a means of influencing the Irish vote in the House of Commons. Mr. Asquith said quite truly in debate forty-four years later: 'Both parties in the state, with perfect impartiality, have dipped their hands into this sacrilegious windfall for the most secular purpose it is possible to conceive.'*

The division on the second reading was the first parade of the opposing forces, and the Government majority was 118. In the House of Commons the resistance to the Bill was resolute, but not dilatory or obstructive, and in due course the measure went to the Lords. There, after negotiations between Granville and Cairns, in which Tait, whom the Queen had recently appointed to the Archbishopric of Canterbury, in disregard of Disraeli's wishes, took an important part, it passed into law. Amendments had been made which in Disraeli's opinion 'saved the honor of the Lords, and would satisfy all moderate men.'

During the whole of this year he was in weak health, and partly from this cause, and partly because of his literary labours, his attendance at the House of Commons was much less regular than it had been for many years. The quiet weeks in the early part of 1870 enabled him to finish his task, and the manuscript was given to Longman just before February 15, on which day the second of Gladstone's remedial measures, the Irish Land Bill, was introduced. He was unwell and unable to be in his place, but Gathorne Hardy declared on his behalf that the Bill would receive candid and, indeed, a favourable consideration. The main principle of the Bill was the extension to all Ireland of the Ulster custom, by which a tenant

* *Hansard*, 61, 816 (1914)

could only be evicted for non-payment of rent, and was entitled on leaving the holding to compensation by the landlord for unexhausted improvements. This proposal had for many years been supported by Disraeli, and in 1858 and 1867 Bills to carry it out had been prepared under his direction, though with a Government in a minority it was not possible to carry them into law. Now the Conservatives supported the second reading of the Bill, which was carried against a small group of three Tories and eight Irishmen by 442 to 11. The committee stage was long, and the Prime Minister became alarmed. He feared another Dunkellin amendment, which would throw the Irish land question, as that had thrown the reform question, into Disraeli's hands, and on one evening he threatened to withdraw the Bill if an amendment moved by a Liberal member was carried. Even this threat only brought him a majority of thirty-two. He noted that Disraeli 'had not spoken one word against valuation of rents or perpetuity of tenure.' 'It was from the house of his friends,' says Lord Morley, 'that the danger came.'* The danger passed, and the Bill was read a third time without a division, and was carried without difficulty through the Upper House.

At the beginning of May *Lothair* was published, and had an extraordinary success. The trade subscription was so eager that the fifth edition of 1,000 copies was in the press on the day of publication, and four days later Disraeli received from his publisher the pleasantest letter that can come to an author.

Thomas Longman wrote:

FARNBOROUGH HILL,
HANTS,
May 6, 1870.

There has been a run on your bankers in Paternoster Row, and our last thousand is nearly gone! We shall have another thousand in hand on Wednesday

* Lord Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, ii., 295.

next. This will be the *sixth* thousand, and I do not feel quite certain we shall not be broken before Wednesday. I am not sure that it would not do good, now we have nearly 5,000 in circulation. On Monday morning Mr. Mudie's house was, I am told, in a state of siege. At an early hour his supply was sent in two carts. But real subscribers, and representative footmen, in large masses were there before them. Mr. Mudie has had 700 more copies.

The three-volume edition, at 31s. 6d., was reprinted in June, and the sale went on briskly. Baron Tauchnitz included it in his famous Continental series, and sold so many copies that he voluntarily doubled the payment he had agreed to make. In America the first output of the Appleton Press was 25,000 copies, and these were sold in three days. By October 80,000 copies had found purchasers there.

This success suggested a collected edition of Disraeli's novels at 6s. a volume. The first volume was *Lothair*. It appeared in November, and 15,000 copies of this volume were sold at once.

The financial result of the thirteen months of intermittent and jealously concealed labour was very satisfactory. The profit which Disraeli received, then and after, from the sale of *Lothair* and the increased circulation of his earlier books, amounted to very nearly £10,000.

There is not room in this volume for an adequate account of the story of *Lothair* or a discussion of its literary merits. That will be found completely and admirably performed in the chapter on *Lothair* in the fifth volume of Mr. Buckle's work. It must suffice to say here that in the judgement of the writer of this book—a judgement which he hopes will be tested by many of his readers by a careful perusal or reperusal of the work itself—*Lothair* is the finest and most interesting of Disraeli's novels.

It seems probable that the success of this book would have induced its author to turn away from

political struggles, and seek in literature—for he could never be idle—the ' comparative repose ' of which he had spoken in his letter to the Queen, had he not given her his promise to continue in her service in or out of office. That promise must be kept. So, after writing and laying aside a few pages of another novel, he set to work with much energy to carry forward the work of the National Union of Conservative Associations which Cecil Raikes and John Eldon Gorst had set on foot three years before. After the conference and banquet mentioned in a previous chapter, the influence of the Union had been widely extended. But the conduct of the 1868 election by the ' limited but influential committee of gentlemen ' had been far from satisfactory, and Disraeli looked about for a man of strong character and of political experience who could be made the organising agent of the Conservative party. He was fortunate in finding in Gorst exactly the instrument he needed. Gorst had been member for Cambridge from 1866 to 1868, and had then lost his seat. His work for the National Union, of which he was one of two honorary secretaries, had given him a wider knowledge of the English constituencies and their political condition than was possessed by any other member of the party. In 1870 Disraeli appointed him chief Conservative agent, and gave him offices at Parliament Street, and an adequate staff, and made that the headquarters of the National Union. Thenceforward the Conservative leader took an immediate personal interest in the conduct of Parliamentary elections. He was in constant communication with Gorst. If a vacancy occurred, he interested himself in the selection of a candidate, and the decision how he could be best supported, and when the contest was over he discussed with the agent the causes of failure or success. He soon found Gorst to be worthy of his entire confidence, and from that time the Conservative organisation went on from strength to strength.

Disraeli was now on the eve of the decisive step in the great career which Alfred Tennyson had accurately described in unconscious prophecy four years before the Maidstone election had been its beginning. In tales of chivalry and adventure the hero passes through alternate difficulty and success, and just before he reaches the final triumph he meets a crisis which threatens to defeat his dearest hope. It was thus in the romance of real life which is told in this book. At the end of 1871 it appeared to many observers that Disraeli's day of political power was over. There was disaffection among his followers, caused partly by disappointment that Gladstone had been able to carry into law both his Irish Bills, while Disraeli had not, either in the House or outside it, given them the strong lead they expected. A great meeting at Manchester was in contemplation, and was mentioned to him from time to time, but he would not fix a date; and meanwhile he might be writing another society novel. To borrow a phrase from the Stock Exchange, his stock was going rapidly down in the market, and, alarmed by the reports of the party Whips as to the general feeling in the country, the men who had been his strongest and most trusted colleagues when he was Prime Minister began to cabal against him. Strangely enough, Cairns, who owed more than any other to his confidence and friendship, who had been made by him Attorney-General and Lord Chancellor, and for a time the leader of the House of Lords, took the chief share in the plot, and suggested at a meeting of members of the late Cabinet that Disraeli should be informed of the general wish that he should yield the leadership of the party to Lord Derby. Derby was not present, and knew nothing of the scheme. Some courageous person—not Cairns—went to Disraeli with the proposal. One or two others went with him. Disraeli listened quite quietly to the suggestion, heard their views, and did not trouble to combat them.

They thought the proposal might be accepted. It occurred to one of them before retiring to ask where Disraeli would sit if this change of leadership took place. ' Oh ! below the gangway, of course,' said he. That was sufficient; there was no more talk of a new leader. But Disraeli at once fixed the date of the Manchester meeting.

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BOOK V

POWER

XXIII. 1872: TWO SPEECHES
XXIV. THE SUPREME TEST
XXV. 1873: ATTAINMENT
XXVI. PLACE AND POWER
XXVII. IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS
XXVIII. BERLIN--PEACE WITH HONOUR

CHAPTER XXIII

1872: TWO SPEECHES

DISRAELI'S speech at the end of the session in 1848 had secured for him the leadership of the Conservative party in the House of Commons. His speech on the second reading of the Reform Bill of 1867 had made him the inevitable Prime Minister when Derby disappeared from the scene. Now two speeches—one at Manchester in April, 1872, and one at the Crystal Palace in June of the same year—made it clear that, if health and strength should last, he was on his way to a greater triumph—the regaining for the Conservative party the dominant power which it had not tasted since 1846.

When Gladstone came to office with his great majority of 118, Disraeli saw that until its inharmonious elements had brought about internal troubles, or its leaders had made some conspicuous blunders in policy or administration, direct and violent attacks would be worse than useless. Just before the session of 1869 he wrote to Lord Stanley, 'I think on our part there should be at present the utmost reserve and quietness,' and declined a proposal that he should be entertained at a banquet in Lancashire. He persevered in this policy, and in December, 1870, again refused the invitation, saying that he doubted the expediency of political gatherings at that time. He was not yet ready for a General Election, and he had no mind to be again a Minister on sufferance. In March, 1871, Lord John Manners reported to his brother, 'The Government are sinking every day, and Disraeli seems to fear they will collapse too soon.'*

* Whibley, *Lord John Manners and his Friends*, ii., 151.

In that month they proposed a secret committee to investigate the condition of some counties of Ireland, where anarchy was rampant and spreading, and Disraeli, declining to be responsible for refusing to the Government any means which they declared necessary for combating the disorders which their Irish legislation appeared to have increased, left the House with fifty or sixty of his followers to prevent a premature defeat and resignation. He would not take part in a defeat; but he spoke in the debate, and his caustic indictment of Gladstone had great effect on public opinion. He said: 'The right hon. gentleman persuaded the people of England that with regard to Irish politics he was in possession of the philosopher's stone. Well, Sir, he has been returned to this House with an immense majority, with the object of securing the tranquillity and content of Ireland. Has anything been grudged him? Time, labour, devotion—whatever has been demanded has been accorded, whatever has been proposed has been carried. Under his influence and at his instance we have legalised confiscation, consecrated sacrilege, condoned high treason; we have destroyed churches, we have shaken property to its foundation, and we have emptied gaols; and now he cannot govern a county without coming to a Parliamentary committee! The right hon. gentleman, after all his heroic exploits, and at the head of his great majority, is making government ridiculous.'

Notwithstanding the discontent of followers less patient and less foreseeing than himself, Disraeli had persevered during the whole of the year 1871 in watchful attention and criticism, and in abstaining both in and out of the House from any formal attack on the Ministry. As we have seen, he carried out his plan of campaign until his officers were almost mutinous, but the moment he saw that to curb their impatience longer would be to strain their loyalty too far, he gave signal for a general advance, and led the way into action. Directly the movement began it

was found that his personal popularity had greatly increased. One reason may be found in a speech which he had lately delivered at the harvest festival at Hughenden. It was a well-conceived and finely worded vindication of the Queen, whose avoidance of public appearances since the death of the Prince Consort had become the subject of unsympathetic and disloyal comments. From no other lips than Disraeli's could have come so complete and so authoritative a description of the laborious duties of the Sovereign, and of the value to the country of the experience and influence of a Queen who had full knowledge of all the great and important affairs of state, both foreign and domestic, and had at all times given to her Ministers a complete confidence and undeviating support. The speech made an end of unfriendly criticism on the Queen, and did much to secure for Disraeli the goodwill of the people.

There was another reason for his increased popularity. Those who were at that time watching the currents of public opinion will remember the impression which was made by the grant of a peerage to his wife. It was a gracious gesture on his part. He had earned the peerage which the Queen would gladly have conferred upon him. When, with her permission, he stood aside and handed the honour which he deserved to the lady, now nearing her eightieth year of age, whose wealth had enabled him to pursue the course of political adventure which her affection had encouraged and sustained, the prejudice against him which many had imbibed changed to an admiring regard which no exhibition of political or literary power would have engendered. Whatever the causes may have been, there can be no doubt of a personal popularity which was demonstrated by his remarkable reception in the city and all along the course of their homeward drive on February 27, 1872, when he and his wife attended the thanksgiving service at St. Paul's Cathedral for the recovery of the

Prince of Wales from an illness which had nearly proved fatal. As he and his aged wife drove home in an open carriage the cheers which greeted them nerved him to a fresh conflict, and were an augury of success.

The forward movement began at Manchester on April 2, 1872. On that day took place the greatest political demonstration ever seen in Lancashire. Deputations came from nearly 300 associations, clubs, and Orange Lodges, to present addresses to the Conservative leader. It had been intended that the ceremony of presentation should have taken place in the open air, and a platform had been set up in the Pomona Gardens. But the bad weather prevented this. From early morning through the whole day the storm of rain and sleet was almost unceasing, and it was in the vast dancing-hall that the presentations were made. The deputations, with banners and party badges and many bands, met in Albert Square, and were formed into a procession nearly a mile and a half long, which steadily made its uncomfortable way to the Gardens. By five o'clock in the afternoon some thirty thousand people crowded the hall, and when presently Viscountess Beaconsfield came forward alone on the platform (a very happy touch of her husband's unerring instinct), there was a scene of great enthusiasm. When, after an interval long enough to allow his wife to enjoy her reception, Disraeli appeared, leaning on the arm of his host at Manchester, Mr. Romaine Callender, there was, of course, a fresh and long-continued outburst. Then for an hour the deputations passed before him. An address was read, the others were silently presented, and Disraeli shook hands with each leader of a deputation, and said to many of them a few sentences referring to the constituencies from which they came.

In its comment next day upon the importance of the demonstration, *The Times* said: 'To-day the exposition of the present Conservative faith is to be

made by Mr. Disraeli. On the views which he unfolds it may greatly depend whether the effects of the present demonstration pass away with the curiosity and excitement of the hour, or whether they abide and give impetus to the Conservative reaction.' Of the results of the speech he delivered on the following evening to a meeting of six or seven thousand supporters at the Free Trade Hall there can be no doubt. They were immediate and permanent, and when on June 24 he spoke at a banquet on the occasion of the annual conference of the National Union, the tone of increasing confidence was clearly heard.

The speech delivered at Manchester lasted for more than three hours, and occupies thirty-three pages of Mr. Kebbel's excellent volumes of Disraeli's *Selected Speeches*. The after-dinner speech at the Crystal Palace was about a third of that length. They cannot, of course, be fully set out in this volume. But they must not be passed over. After the great second reading speech in 1867 Count Vitzthum, formerly Saxon Minister in London, and an old friend of Disraeli, wrote him a letter of congratulation. In it he said: 'Looking on, without party bias, for fourteen years, I could not help being struck by the fact that you appeared to be the only man in England working for posterity. Your genius bore, to my eyes, always the historical stamp, and I never listened to a speech of yours without thinking, this word, this sentence, will be remembered a hundred years hence.'

It was a shrewd comment, and time is justifying it. The words, the sentences of Disraeli are living and effective to-day, as rich in instruction, and as potent in stimulating and directing political action as they were half a century ago; and so far from it now seeming likely that in another half-century they will be forgotten, they are more and more frequently being quoted in political writings and speeches. To no speech of Disraeli's do Count Vitzthum's words more closely apply than to these two. Some sentences

must be quoted in the hope that they will send many readers to Mr. Kebbel's volumes, or to the publications of the National Union or the Primrose League. Without a thoughtful perusal of them it is not possible to understand the effect they had in giving their author the power he used so well, and the influence he still exercises over political thought.

The Conservative Programme.

The Conservative party are accused of having no programme of policy. If by a programme is meant a plan to despoil churches and plunder landlords, I admit we have no programme. If by a programme is meant a policy which assails or menaces every institution and every interest, every class and every calling in the country, I admit we have no programme. But if to have a policy with distinct ends, and these such as most deeply interest the great body of the nation, be a becoming programme for a political party, then, I contend, we have an adequate programme, and one which, here or elsewhere, I shall always be prepared to assert and to vindicate.

The Crown.

Gentlemen, since the settlement of that Constitution, now nearly two centuries ago, England has never experienced a revolution, though there is no country in which there has been so continuous and such considerable change. How is this? Because the wisdom of your forefathers placed the prize of supreme power without the sphere of human passions. Whatever the struggle of parties, whatever the strife of factions, whatever the excitement and exaltation of the public mind, there has always been something in this country round which all classes and parties could rally, representing the majesty of the law, the administration of justice, and involving, at the same time, the security for every man's rights, and the fountain of honour.

* * * * *

Gentlemen, the influence of the Crown is not confined merely to political affairs. England is a domestic

country. Here the home is revered and the hearth is sacred. The nation is represented by a family —the Royal Family; and if that family is educated with a sense of responsibility and a sentiment of public duty, it is difficult to exaggerate the salutary influence they may exercise over a nation. It is not merely an influence upon manners; it is not merely that they are a model for refinement and for good taste—they affect the heart as well as the intelligence of the people; and in the hour of public adversity, or in the anxious conjuncture of public affairs, the nation rallies round the family and the Throne, and its spirit is animated and sustained by the expression of public affection.

The Peerage.

But, gentlemen, the charge against the House of Lords is that the dignities are hereditary, and we are told that if we have a House of Peers they should be peers for life. There are great authorities in favour of this, and even my noble friend* near me the other day gave in his adhesion to a limited application of this principle. Now, gentlemen, in the first place, let me observe that every peer is a peer for life, as he cannot be a peer after his death; but some peers for life are succeeded in their dignities by their children. The question arises, Who is most responsible —a peer for life whose dignities are not descendible, or a peer for life whose dignities are hereditary? Now, gentlemen, a peer for life is in a very strong position. He says, 'Here I am; I have got power and I will exercise it.' I have no doubt that, on the whole, a peer for life would exercise it for what he deemed was the public good. Let us hope that. But, after all, he might and could exercise it according to his own will. Nobody can call him to account; he is independent of everybody. But a peer for life whose dignities descend is in a very different position. He has every inducement to study public opinion, and, when he believes it just, to yield; because he naturally feels that if the order to which he belongs is in constant collision with public opinion, the chances are that his dignities will not descend to his posterity.

* Lord Derby.

The House of Commons.

Gentlemen, it is said that the diminished power of the Throne and the assailed authority of the House of Lords are owing to the increased power of the House of Commons, and the new position which of late years, and especially during the last forty years, it has assumed in the English Constitution. Gentlemen, the main power of the House of Commons depends upon its command over the public purse and its control of the public expenditure; and if that power is possessed by a party which has a large majority in the House of Commons, the influence of the House of Commons is proportionately increased, and, under some circumstances, becomes more predominant. But, gentlemen, this power of the House of Commons is not a power which has been created by any Reform Act from the days of Lord Grey in 1832 to 1867. It is the power which the House of Commons has enjoyed for centuries, which it has frequently asserted and sometimes even tyrannically exercised. Gentlemen, the House of Commons represents the constituencies of England, and I am here to show you that no addition to the elements of that constituency has placed the House of Commons in a different position with regard to the Throne and the House of Lords from that it has always constitutionally occupied.

The Church and Education.

But, gentlemen, the Constitution of England is not merely a Constitution in state; it is a Constitution in Church and state. The wisest Sovereigns and statesmen have ever been anxious to connect authority with religion, some to increase their power, some, perhaps, to mitigate its exercise. But the same difficulty has been experienced in effecting this union which has been experienced in forming a second chamber—either the spiritual power has usurped upon the civil and established a sacerdotal society, or the civil power has invaded successfully the rights of the spiritual, and the ministers of religion have been degraded into stipendiaries of the state and instruments of the Government. In England we accomplish this great

result by an alliance between Church and state, between two originally independent powers.

* * * * *

Nothing is more surprising to me than the plea on which the present outcry is made against the Church of England. I could not believe that in the nineteenth century the charge against the Church of England should be that Churchmen, and especially the clergy, had educated the people. If I were to fix upon one circumstance more than another which redounded to the honour of Churchmen, it is that they should fulfil this noble office; and, next to being 'the stewards of Divine mysteries,' I think the greatest distinction of the clergy is the admirable manner in which they have devoted their lives and their fortunes to this greatest of national objects.

* * * * *

Religious education is demanded by the nation generally, and by the instincts of human nature. I should like to see the Church and the Nonconformists work together; but I trust, whatever may be the result, the country will stand by the Church in its efforts to maintain the religious education of the people.

Sanitation.

In attempting to legislate upon social matters the great object is to be practical—to have before us some distinct aims and some distinct means by which they can be accomplished.

Gentlemen, I think public attention as regards these matters ought to be concentrated upon sanitary legislation. That is a wide subject, and, if properly treated, comprises almost every consideration which has a just claim upon legislative interference. Pure air, pure water, the inspection of unhealthy habitations, the adulteration of food—there and many kindred matters may be legitimately dealt with by the legislature.

* * * * *

Gentlemen, I cannot impress upon you too strongly my conviction of the importance of the legislature

and society uniting together in favour of these important results. A great scholar and a great wit 300 years ago said that, in his opinion, there was a great mistake in the Vulgate, which, as you all know, is the Latin translation of the Holy Scriptures, and that, instead of saying, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity'—*Vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas*—the wise and witty King really said, *Sanitas sanitatum, omnia sanitas*. Gentlemen, it is impossible to overrate the importance of the subject. After all, the first consideration of a minister should be the health of the people. A land may be covered with historic trophies, with museums of science and galleries of art, with universities and with libraries; the people may be civilised and ingenious; the country may be even famous in the annals and action of the world; but, gentlemen, if the population every ten years decreases, and the stature of the race every ten years diminishes, the history of that country will soon be the history of the past.

Foreign Affairs.

Gentlemen, don't suppose, because I counsel firmness and decision at the right moment, that I am of that school of statesmen who are favourable to a turbulent and aggressive diplomacy. I have resisted it during a great part of my life. I am not unaware that the relations of England to Europe have undergone a vast change during the century that has just elapsed. The relations of England to Europe are not the same as they were in the days of Lord Chatham or Frederick the Great. The Queen of England has become the Sovereign of the most powerful of Oriental states. On the other side of the globe there are now establishments belonging to her teeming with wealth and population, which will, in due time, exercise their influence over the distribution of power. The old establishments of this country, now the United States of America, throw their lengthening shades over the Atlantic, which mix with European waters. These are vast and novel elements in the distribution of power. I acknowledge that the policy of England with respect to Europe should be a policy of reserve, but proud reserve; and in answer to those statesmen—

those mistaken statesmen who have intimated the decay of the power of England and the decline of its resources—I express here my confident conviction that there never was a moment in our history when the power of England was so great and her resources so vast and inexhaustible.

So far for the Manchester speech. It is not necessary to quote so fully from the speech at the Crystal Palace, although every page of it should be studied, but the closing passage must be here inserted if only for the strong note of confidence in a coming success.

But on all the three great objects which are sought by Toryism—the maintenance of our institutions, the preservation of our Empire, and the improvement of the condition of the people—I find a rising opinion in the country sympathising with our tenets, and prepared, I believe, if the opportunity offers, to uphold them until they prevail.

Before sitting down, I would make one remark particularly applicable to those whom I am now addressing. This is a numerous assembly; this is an assembly individually influential; but it is not on account of its numbers, it is not on account of its individual influence that I find it to me deeply interesting. It is because I know that I am addressing a representative assembly. It is because I know that there are men here who come from all districts and all quarters of England, who represent classes and powerful societies, and who meet here not merely for the pleasure of a festival, but because they believe that our assembling together may lead to national advantage. Yes, I tell all who are here present that there is a responsibility which you have incurred to-day, and which you must meet like men. When you return to your homes, when you return to your counties and to your cities, you must tell to all those whom you can influence that the time is at hand—that, at least, it cannot be far distant—when England will have to decide between national and cosmopolitan principles. The issue is not a mean one. It is whether you will be content to be a comfortable England, modelled and moulded upon Continental

principles, and meeting in due course an inevitable fate, or whether you will be a great country, an Imperial country, a country where your sons, when they rise, rise to paramount positions, and obtain not merely the esteem of their countrymen, but command the respect of the world.

No one who was present could forget the shout that burst forth when the challenging voice rang out: 'Tell all those you can influence that the time is at hand.'

CHAPTER XXIV

1872–3: THE SUPREME TEST

At the date of the Crystal Palace dinner Disraeli's life was already clouded by the advancing shadow of the heaviest sorrow of human life, the parting from one with whom have been spent many years of the companionship of a happy marriage. Soon after the visit to Manchester Lady Beaconsfield's health suddenly failed. Probably the rain-soaked atmosphere of the Pomona Gardens had been, at her age, too severe a trial. Her appetite and even her capacity of taking food seemed almost to disappear, and by the middle of May her husband believed she could not recover. He wrote to Montagu Corry: 'Nothing encouraging at home. To see her every day weaker and weaker is heart-rending. . . . To witness the gradual death of one who has shared so long and so completely my life, entirely unmans me.' The Whitsuntide Parliamentary recess was spent at Hughenden, and there seemed to be some slight improvement. But Hughenden was not convenient for the frequent and sudden requirement of medical attendance, and after the holiday they returned to London. The whole of August and September was spent at Grosvenor Gate, and during those two months Disraeli hardly left his wife's side. He wrote to Gathorne Hardy on September 16 an account of the way in which their time was passed. 'We have never left Grosvenor Gate, tho', as everything has been tried in vain, Lady Beaconsfield now talks of trying change of air, and endeavouring to get down to Hughenden. As for myself, I have never been into the town during the whole of August and the present month, so, when

business commences, Pall Mall and Whitehall shall be as fresh to me as to my happier comrades who are shooting in Scotland or climbing the Alps. One has the advantage here, when we wake, of looking upon trees and bowery vistas, and we try to forget that the park is called Hyde, and that the bowers are the bowers of Kensington. We take drives in the counties of Middlesex and Surrey, and discover beautiful retreats of which we had never heard, so we have the excitement of travel.' At the end of September they went to Hughenden, and again there seemed to be a slight improvement. But it did not last, and in the first week of December an attack of congestion of the lungs swept away all hope of recovery. On December 15 she died. Letters of condolence poured in upon the bereaved husband. In the presence of so great a sorrow political animosities were for a time forgotten. Gladstone wrote: 'You and I were, as I believe, married in the same year. It has been permitted to both of us to enjoy a priceless boon during a third of a century. Spared myself the blow which has fallen on you, I can form some conception of what it must have been and be. I do not presume to offer you the consolation which you will seek from another and higher quarter. I offer only the assurance that all who know you, all who knew Lady Beaconsfield, and especially those among them who, like myself, enjoyed for a long time her marked but unmerited regard, may perhaps render without impropriety the assurance that in this trying hour they feel deeply for you and with you.'

The reply was: 'I am much touched by your kind words in my great sorrow. I trust, I earnestly trust, that you may be spared a similar affliction. Marriage is the greatest earthly happiness when founded on complete sympathy. That hallowed lot was mine, and for a moiety of my existence; and I know it is yours.' By the death of his wife Disraeli lost a sweet and sustaining companionship, and he also lost his

home and the substantial income they had shared. The house at Grosvenor Gate passed to other owners, and only a very few weeks were given him for the removal of its contents. It was a sore trial to him to leave almost at once the house in which he had lived for thirty-three years, and with every nook and corner of which the happiest memories of his life were associated. He took rooms at Edwards's Hotel in George Street, Hanover Square, and there was very unhappy. 'All my friends admire my rooms. I cannot say I agree with them, but things may mend.' 'Hotel life in an evening is a cave of despair.' 'I dine to-morrow with the Malmesburys; it is better than dining here alone, which is intolerable, or at a club, which even with a book is not very genial.'

These are scraps from his letters to Montagu Corry, who had been called away by his father's serious and, as it proved, fatal illness, and whose absence until late in March added greatly to Disraeli's troubles. Then, as usual, the cold winds of early spring brought illness, and on March 7, 1873, he wrote to Corry: 'I am a prisoner and almost prostrate with one of those atmospheric attacks which the English persist in calling "colds," and for the first time in my life am absent from the House of Commons in the midst of a pitched battle.'

This 'pitched battle' in the House was a specific which worked wonders. It cured him of physical weakness, and of the despondency which was so unwonted. It was the fight on the Irish Education Bill which Gladstone had introduced on February 13, and which came on for second reading on March 3. The prisoner was soon at large, and there was no sign of weakness or depression in the speech which he delivered on the fourth and closing night of the second reading debate. It was a fitting occasion for a great effort of debating power. 'Sir,' said Disraeli once to a new member, 'you will find the House of Commons a dull place, with its brilliant moments.' This was, indeed, a brilliant moment. The House was crowded.

Nearly six hundred members listened to the final speeches, and crowds waited in Palace Yard in eager discussion of the chance of a Ministerial defeat. As the evening drew on the Whips on either side grew more and more doubtful as to the result. Although the Government had still a nominal majority of over one hundred, there was much dissension in their ranks. The second division of Gladstone's *corps d'armée*, the English and Welsh Nonconformists, had not been very steady in their allegiance since the debates on the Education Bill of 1870, when Bright and Miall tried to prevent any religious teaching being given in the public elementary schools, and had been obliged to content themselves with the foolish and mischievous compromise of the Cowper-Temple clause. Now the third division, the Irish Roman Catholics, were going to desert their leader.

The incidents of 1868 had been repeated. Cardinal Manning had now, in negotiation with Gladstone, quite properly repeated the attempt he had made in negotiation with Disraeli in 1867–68 to bring about an agreed settlement of an urgent and very difficult problem. The Bill satisfied him; and as late as a fortnight after the first reading he believed that Cardinal Cullen and the Irish Bishops, on whose behalf he had been acting, would accept it. Then they a second time threw him over. On March 9, while the second reading debate was in progress, a Pastoral by Cardinal Cullen violently denouncing the Bill was read in all the Roman Catholic churches in Ireland.

Disraeli rose at half-past ten on the night of March 11, and spoke for an hour and a half. No speech of his deserves more careful study by those who wish to learn the art of effective debating. The greatest skill was called for and the greatest discretion. Strong currents of opinion were running through the House, and a faulty illustration, or even an ambiguous sentence, might affect a few votes when every vote was of the utmost value. There is no need to quote

it here at much length, for the details of the controversy on the clauses of the measure are no longer of importance. But the passage in which he dealt with the question of concurrent endowment has more than simply historical interest.

Let me remind the House—for though it is modern history, I may be pardoned for referring to it—let me, I say, remind the House of the general system under which Ireland was governed a few years ago, a system, however, which had prevailed for a considerable time. It was a system which endeavoured, not equally, but at the same time gradually to assist, so far as religion and education were concerned, the various creeds and classes of that country. It had in its rude elements been introduced into Ireland a very considerable time back, but during the present century it had been gradually but completely developed, and it was called, or has been called of late years, concurrent endowment. I am not going to entrap the House into a discussion on the merits of concurrent endowment, for concurrent endowment is dead, and I will tell you in a few minutes who killed it. But this I will say of concurrent endowment, that it was at least a policy, and the policy of great statesmen. It was the policy of Pitt, of Grey, of Russell, of Peel, and of Palmerston. The Protestant Church of Ireland under that system had held its property of which, in my opinion, it has been unjustly and injuriously deprived. The Roman Catholics had a magnificent and increasing collegiate establishment. The Presbyterians had a *Regium Donum*, which I always was of opinion ought to have been doubled. So far as Lord Palmerston was concerned —and Lord Palmerston was always called the Protestant Premier—he had prepared, and had himself recommended in this House, to secure to the Roman Catholics their glebes.

That policy is dead. But, Sir, when Lord Derby had to consider this question, he had to consider it under the influence of that policy.

* * * * *

Propositions were made and placed before him. It became our duty, according to our view of our duty, to place ourselves in communication with the Roman Catholic hierarchy. We thought that was the proper course to pursue—that it was better to attempt to bring about a satisfactory settlement of which there appeared to be some probability by such straightforward means rather than by dark and sinister intrigues. Two Roman Catholic prelates were delegated to this country to enter into communication with the Government. Unfortunately, when the time had arrived, power had left Lord Derby, and I was his unworthy representative. I did not think it my duty, or for the public service, to place myself in personal communication with those gentlemen; but two of my colleagues did me the honour of representing me and the Government on that occasion —one of them eminent for his knowledge of Ireland and of the subject, the late Lord Mayo; and the other a man distinguished for his knowledge of human nature, the late Lord Privy Seal (Lord Malmesbury). And I am bound to say that they represented to me —and I mention them as competent judges of the matter—that those negotiations were conducted by the Roman Catholic prelates with dignity and moderation. Sir, I may have been too sanguine; but there was a time when I believed that some settlement of this question, honourable and satisfactory to all classes, might have been made. I am bound to say that no offer of endowment was made by the Government. I am still more bound to say that no offer of endowment was urged—although it might have been mentioned—by the Roman Catholic prelates.

* * * * *

The right honourable gentleman opposite was a pupil of Sir Robert Peel. He sat in the Cabinet of Lord Palmerston, who was supposed to be a devoted votary of the policy of concurrent endowment. The right honourable gentleman, suddenly—I impute no motive; that is quite unnecessary—but the right honourable gentleman suddenly changed his mind, and threw over the policy of concurrent endowment, mistaking the clamour of the Nonconformists for

the voice of the nation. The Roman Catholics fell into the trap. They forgot the cause of University education in the prospect of destroying the Protestant Church. The right honourable gentleman succeeded in his object. He became Prime Minister of England. If he had been a little more patient, without throwing over concurrent endowment, he would, perhaps, have been Prime Minister as soon. The Roman Catholics had the satisfaction of destroying the Protestant Church, of disestablishing the Protestant Church.

Then, at the end of the speech came an appeal to the country, and a few words which showed how carefully the speaker was gauging the feeling of the House and the consummate skill with which the denunciation of the Government closed with just a hint of a prophecy which served for an invitation or a warning.

The Prime Minister is no ordinary man. (Ministerial cheers.) I am very glad that my sincere compliment has obtained for the right honourable gentleman the only cheer which his party have conferred upon him during this discussion. The right honourable gentleman had a substitute for the policy of concurrent endowment, which had been killed by the Roman Catholics themselves. The right honourable gentleman substituted the policy of confiscation. You have had four years of it. You have despoiled churches. You have threatened every corporation and endowment in the country. You have examined into everybody's affairs. You have criticised every profession and vexed every trade. No one is certain of his property, and nobody knows what duties he may have to perform to-morrow. This is the policy of confiscation as compared with that of concurrent endowment. The Irish Roman Catholic clergy were perfectly satisfied while you were despoiling the Irish Church. They looked not unwillingly upon the plunder of the Irish landlords, and they thought that the time had arrived when the great drama would be fulfilled, and the spirit of confiscation would descend upon the celebrated walls of Trinity College, would level them to the ground, and endow the University of Stephen's Green.

I ventured to remark at the time when the policy of the right honourable gentleman was introduced that confiscation was contagious. I believe that the people of this country have had enough of the policy of confiscation. From what I can see, the House of Commons elected to carry out that policy are beginning to experience some of the inconveniences of satiety, and if I am not mistaken, they will give some intimation to the Government to-night that that is their opinion also.

Gladstone took two hours for his reply, and at two o'clock in the morning of the 12th came the division. So close was it expected to be that Speaker Brand prepared the form of the reason he would give for his casting vote.

One well-known Conservative member was at the House, but did not vote. While the division was proceeding, Beresford Hope and one or two non-members were at the locked glass door of the corridor leading from the lobby to the library. There was a long silence, then a roar of tumultuous cheering, and members came rushing out of the House with news that the Government were defeated by a majority of three (287 to 284). And when the lobby doors were opened one could hear the shouts of the crowd in the streets.

Gladstone's resignation was accepted, and Disraeli was sent for. In accordance with a decision come to by him and his leading colleagues in the late Government, he declined to accept office in the then existing Parliament, and when the Queen offered a dissolution he still refused. So the Queen sent Colonel Ponsonby to Gladstone to tell him that Disraeli had declined to take office, and to say that in now asking his advice she considered that she was sending for him again.

Gladstone said that he did not quite understand what Disraeli's answer had been, and wished it to be put in writing. This was done by Disraeli in two paragraphs, which to the Queen and to anyone but Gladstone were clearly an unconditional refusal to

take office. They were sent to Gladstone, who thereupon reported to the Queen in a lengthy verbal criticism upon their phrases that 'he did not feel himself able to gather their precise effect.' The Queen once said that Gladstone addressed her as if she was a public meeting. Now he behaved as if she was a Royal Commission, and sent her a momorandum upon the misconduct of Disraeli in refusing to take office. The memorandum, which dealt fully with the behaviour of Prime Ministers since 1832, was so lengthy that Gladstone's biographer, Lord Morley, was forced for very shame's sake to relegate the historical part of it to an appendix. The Queen sent it to Disraeli, who replied the next day in a much shorter document, a few paragraphs of which are too valuable to be forgotten:

The argument of Mr. Gladstone, in the first instance, is that the Opposition, having by 'deliberate and concerted action' thrown out a Bill which the Government had declared to be 'vital to their existence,' is bound to use all means to form a Government of its own, in order to replace that which it must be held to have intentionally overthrown.

It is humbly submitted to your Majesty that though, as a general rule, this doctrine may be sound, it cannot be laid down unconditionally, nor otherwise than subject to many exceptions.

It is undoubtedly sound so far as this: that for an Opposition to use its strength for the express purpose of throwing out a Government, which it is at the time aware that it cannot replace—having that object in view, and no other—would be an act of recklessness and faction which could not be too strongly condemned. But it may be safely affirmed that no conduct of this kind can be imputed to the Conservative Opposition of 1873.

If the doctrine in question is carried further; if it be contended that, whenever, from any circumstances, a Minister is so situated that it is in his power to prevent any other Parliamentary leader from forming an administration which is likely to stand, he

acquires thereby the right to call upon Parliament to pass whatever measures he and his colleagues think fit, and is entitled to denounce as factious the resistance to such measures—then the claim is one not warranted by usage, or reconcilable with the freedom of the legislature.

It amounts to this: that he tells the House of Commons, 'Unless you are prepared to put someone in my place, your duty is to do whatever I bid you.'

To no House of Commons has language of this kind ever been addressed: by no House of Commons would it be tolerated.

This was sent to Gladstone by the Queen, and he, seeing further argumentation useless, took up again the duties of Prime Minister.

These incidents were the supreme and the final test of Disraeli's courage and patience. His action was approved by those who would have been his chief colleagues in a new Ministry, but he knew that in the general body of his followers it would cause disappointment and anger. The Government was unpopular; by-elections had been full of promise; and to give Gladstone the chance of raising some new cry, and bringing his disordered majority again into harmony and strength, seemed strange conduct in the leader who had urged them on to conflict, but now seemed too faint-hearted to take the spoils of victory. Places, and honours, and the prestige of office, were all within his grasp, and the opportunity might not come again. Disraeli knew how strong this feeling would be. But he had measured the risk and was resolved to face it. There was a pathetic dignity in the speech by which in the House of Commons he justified his action. He described the treatment he would certainly receive if he had attempted to carry on the work of Parliament with a party majority against him:

I know well—and those who are around me know well—what will occur when a Ministry takes office and attempts to carry on the Government with a

minority during the session, with a view of ultimately appealing to the people. We should have what is called 'fair play.' That is to say, no vote of want of confidence would be proposed, and chiefly because it would be of no use. There would be no wholesale censure, but retail humiliation. A right honourable gentleman will come down here; he will arrange his thumb-screws and other instruments of torture on this table; we shall never ask for a vote without a lecture; we shall never perform the most ordinary routine office of Government without there being annexed to it some pedantic and ignominious condition.

I wish to express nothing but what I know from painful personal experience. No contradiction of the kind I have just encountered could divest me of the painful memory; I wish it could. I wish it was not my duty to take this view of the case. In a certain time we should enter into the paradise of abstract resolutions. One day honourable gentlemen cannot withstand the golden opportunity of asking the House to affirm that the income tax should no longer form one of the features of our ways and means. Of course, a proposition of that kind would be scouted by the right honourable gentleman and all his colleagues; but then they might dine out that day, and the resolution might be carried, as resolutions of that kind have been. Then another honourable gentleman, distinguished for his knowledge of men and things, would move that the diplomatic service be abolished. While honourable gentlemen opposite were laughing in their sleeves at the mover, they would vote for the motion in order to put the Government into a minority. For this reason: 'Why should men,' they would say, 'govern the country who are in a minority?' totally forgetting that we had acceded to office in the spirit of the Constitution, quite oblivious of the fountain and origin of the position we occupied. And it would go very hard if on some sultry afternoon some honourable member should not 'rush in where angels fear to tread,' and successfully assimilate the borough and the county franchise. And so things would go on until the bitter end—until at last even the Appropriation Bill has passed, Parliament is dissolved, and we

appeal to those millions who, perhaps six months before, might have looked upon us as the vindicators of intolerable grievances, but who now receive us as a defeated, discredited, and degraded Ministry, whose services can be neither of value to the Crown nor a credit to the nation.

The final passage should be kept in constant remembrance by every member of the constitutional party which he founded and guided by his wisdom and courage and patience to the success which in later days it has maintained.

We are now emerging from the fiscal period in which almost all the public men of this generation have been brought up. All the questions of trade and navigation, of the incidence of taxation and of public economy, are settled. But there are other questions not less important, and of deeper and higher reach and range, which must soon engage the attention of the country. The attributes of a Constitutional Monarchy—whether the aristocratic principle should be recognised in our Constitution, and, if so, in what form; whether the Commons of England shall remain an estate of the realm, numerous but privileged and qualified, or whether they should degenerate into an indiscriminate multitude; whether a national Church shall be maintained, and, if so, what shall be its rights and duties; the functions of corporations, the sacredness of endowments, the tenure of landed property, the free disposal and even the existence of any kind of property—all those institutions and all those principles which have made this country free and famous, and conspicuous for its union of order with liberty, are now impugned, and in due time will become great and 'burning' questions. I think it is of the utmost importance that when that time—which may be nearer at hand than we imagine—arrives, there shall be in this country a great constitutional party, distinguished for its intelligence as well as for its organisation, which shall be competent to lead the people and direct the public mind. And, Sir, when that time arrives, and when they enter upon a career which must be noble, and which I hope

and believe will be triumphant, I think they may perhaps remember, and not perhaps with unkindness, that I at least prevented one obstacle from being placed in their way, when as the trustee of their honour and their interests I declined to form a weak and discredited administration.

CHAPTER XXV

1873: ATTAINMENT

The Government, fatally weakened by the adverse division, and by the proof of its growing unpopularity given by a series of by-elections, tottered on through the rest of the session. Disraeli's attendance in the House was regular, but he was not very active in Parliamentary work. He was giving much care to the arrangements for the General Election, which he expected to take place in March of the following year. He continued to live at Edwards's Hotel in spite of its discomforts; and although he declined to go into general society, he was glad to spend quiet evenings with some of his old friends. Among these friends were two ladies whom he had known for many years when each of them in her turn had been one of the reigning beauties of London society. They were now Lady Chesterfield and Lady Bradford. Lady Chesterfield was seventy years of age, and had been a widow for eight years; Lady Bradford was fifty-five, and was the wife of Lord Bradford, who had been Lord Chamberlain in the Derby-Disraeli Government of 1866–1868. Disraeli seems to have fallen in love with both of them. He made a proposal of marriage to the elder sister, which was refused, but he began, and through the rest of his life continued, a constant correspondence with both of them, and addressed each in the most endearing terms. His letters to Lady Bradford were the more extravagant in their expression of affection, but those to Lady Chesterfield were by no means deficient in warmth. He constantly addressed her as 'dear darling,' and wrote to her when he left her house at Bretby after a visit: 'Adieu,

dear darling friend; I have no language to express to you my entire affection.' The publication of his letters to them, their letters being very properly destroyed, adds another to the mysteries of Disraeli's character. It is not possible to doubt his sincerity, for no affectation of platonic passion would have endured for eight years; and the letters—five hundred to Lady Chesterfield, and no fewer than eleven hundred to Lady Bradford—were written in circumstances the least suited for the philandering of a lonely old statesman. He saw the absurdity of his behaviour. In a letter to Lady Bradford written from the House of Commons on June 29, 1874, when he was in the midst of the fight over the Public Worship Regulation Bill, he says: ' Unfortunately for me, my imagination did not desert me in my youth. I have always felt this a great misfortune. It would have involved me in calamities had not nature bestowed on me and in a large degree another quality—the sense of the ridiculous. That has given me many intimations during some months, but in the turbulence of my heart I was deaf to them.'

Perhaps the most extraordinary of the letters which have been published is one dated August 3, 1874, written by a Prime Minister at the close of a session in which he had for the first time enjoyed the political power which it had been the object of his life to obtain.

To love as I love, and rarely to see the being one adores, whose constant society is absolutely necessary to my life; to be precluded even from the only shadowy compensation for such a torturing doom—the privilege of relieving my heart by expressing its affection—is a lot which I never could endure and cannot.

But for my strange position, which enslaves, while it elevates me, I would fly for ever, as I often contemplate, to some beautiful solitude, and relieve, in ideal creation, the burthen of such a dark and harassing existence. But the iron laws of a stern necessity seem to control our lives, and with all the

daring and all the imagination in the world, conscious or unconscious, we are slaves.

This is rather a long scribblement; pardon that, for it is probably one of the last letters I shall ever send you. My mind is greatly disturbed and dissatisfied. I require perfect solitude or perfect sympathy. My present life gives me neither of those ineffable blessings. It may be brilliant, but it is too fragmentary. It is not a complete existence. It gives me neither the highest development of the intellect nor the heart, neither poetry nor love.

This was not by any means the last letter. Under the influence of a kind letter or kinder interview the mood of depression passed away, but while it lasted it was very real. The romance only ended when, nearly seven years later, Disraeli lay dying in his house in Curzon Street, and Lady Bradford called, and, with the exception of Montagu Corry, Barrington, and Philip Rose, and the physicians, was the last person who saw him alive.

August and the early weeks of September, 1873, were spent by Disraeli in solitude at Hughenden. He was busy in collecting and arranging the mass of letters which Lady Beaconsfield had left in drawers and cupboards and chests. There were five thousand of them, besides those which he had arranged in the first fortnight of the year. Then, for the refreshment of sea air and some companionship, he went to Brighton and stayed at the Bedford Hotel. There he heard the result of an election in which he took much interest. In 1871, when Sir George Jessel was appointed Solicitor-General and went to Dover for re-election, he was opposed by a railway contractor named Barnett, who had made a fortune in constructing the line from Bombay to Calcutta and wished to enter Parliament. Jessel was returned by a majority of eighty-eight. In September, 1873, he was appointed Master of the Rolls, and Forbes, the chairman of the Chatham and Dover Railway, came forward on

the Liberal side. Barnett had only a few days before started for South America, and could not be communicated with. An address was issued in his name, and a member of the Council of the National Union was sent down as deputy candidate. There was a lively contest for a fortnight, and on September 23 the seat was gained for the Conservatives, with a majority of 326. That evening Disraeli was dining with Baron Brunnow and his wife, and on the following day he wrote to Lady Bradford:

Yesterday the Brunnows found me out and took me home to dine with them quite alone. . . . I was amused by the great excitement of Brunnow as to English politics, which he flattered himself he concealed. He was always recurring to the Dover election, which made a great sensation here. We had telegraphs of the poll every hour, and at ten o'clock they gave me a serenade or a chorale, the most beautiful thing I ever heard.

From Brighton he went to pay a visit to Weston, and it was from Weston that he sent an election message which became famous as the 'Bath letter.' It did not save the seat there, but its terse and vigorous sentences had a great effect on the country.

For nearly five years the present Ministers have harassed every trade, worried every profession, and assailed or menaced every class, institution, and species of property in the country. Occasionally they have varied this state of civil warfare by perpetrating some job which outraged public opinion, or by stumbling into mistakes which have been always discreditable, and sometimes ruinous. All this they call a policy, and seem quite proud of it; but the country has, I think, made up its mind to close this career of plundering and blundering.

He now paid a visit to Glasgow, which repeated the success of the Edinburgh demonstration six years earlier. He received the freedom of the city, and was entertained at a civic banquet; he was installed

as Lord Rector of the University, and delivered an eloquent and learned address to the students on 'Self-Knowledge and the Spirit of the Age,' and there was a Conservative demonstration which rivalled the enthusiasm of Manchester. Then he paid some country visits, and as the time for the beginning of the Parliamentary session drew near he took rooms from January 23, 1874, at Edwards's Hotel. 'Miserable—merely a couple of rooms on the ground floor; but they are a sort of headquarters until I get a house, or commit some other folly.'

He arrived at the hotel on the evening of Friday, the 23rd, and on Saturday morning found in the newspaper a long address by Gladstone announcing the immediate dissolution of Parliament and promising to the constituencies a financial surplus and the abolition of the income tax. Disraeli's spirited reply to the challenge was in all the newspapers on Monday morning. Events moved quickly. On the Wednesday Parliament was dissolved; and by the middle of February the great struggle had ended in the return of 350 Conservatives, 245 Liberals, and 57 Home Rulers. Gladstone followed the useful precedent set by Disraeli in 1868, and gave in the resignation of the Cabinet on February 17, 1874, and on the same day the Queen sent for Disraeli. Three days later he kissed hands as Prime Minister.

CHAPTER XXVI

1874-76: PLACE AND POWER

When Disraeli took his seat in the House of Commons on March 29, 1874, he did so as the head of the strongest Government that had been seen in England for many years—strongest not only by the absence of any sectional divisions in the body of supporters, whose numerical strength gave them unquestioned control of the administrative and legislative work of both Houses of Parliament, but in the personal capacity and experience of its chief members. There had been no difficulty in forming the Ministry. His extraordinary tact and knowledge of men had been shown in the distribution of the great offices, and he had wisely reduced the number of the Cabinet from fifteen to twelve—a courageous step, because it involved the disappointment of three of his valuable supporters who had looked forward to Cabinet rank. In the House of Lords, Cairns, Derby, and Salisbury, were a group of men whose debating power and personal influence in the country gave them an ascendancy in that House such as the Duke of Wellington and Lord Lyndhurst had enjoyed in the days, now long past, when a Conservative Ministry was in responsible power. In the House of Commons, Stafford Northcote and Gathorne Hardy worthily supported their chief, and he had with him his 'oldest and dearest friend,' John Manners, loyal and valiant in his service, and one new man, a lawyer from Lancashire, Richard Cross, whose sound judgement and unwearied industry soon made him one of the most valuable members of the Ministry. Outside the Cabinet, Lord George Hamilton, Hicks-Beach, W. H.

Smith, and Hart-Dyke brought special capacities which showed in after years how wisely he had chosen them for responsible office.

The debate on the address was short and unimportant. Its most interesting passage was a generous reference by Disraeli to his chief opponent. Gladstone had added to the embarrassments of his party by a somewhat ambiguous announcement that he would not for the present undertake the duties of the leader of the Opposition, but would give occasional help, and at the end of a year would consider the question of resigning the leadership of the Liberal party. Some unkind observations about him came from the Liberal benches, and Disraeli said: 'The right hon. gentleman's friends were silent, and I must confess I admire their taste and feeling. If I had been a follower of a Parliamentary chief as eminent, even if I thought he had erred, I should have been disposed rather to exhibit sympathy than to offer criticism. I should remember the great victories which he had fought and won; I should remember his illustrious career, its continuous success and splendour, not its accidental or even disastrous mistakes.'

The Ministry addressed itself at once to the preparation of the social legislation which had been foreshadowed in the speech at the Crystal Palace. The session of 1874 was short and somewhat disturbed, and it was not possible to do much that year; but some useful Acts were passed, and the materials were collected for measures which made 1875 notable for its beneficent legislation. It would be tedious, and it is quite unnecessary, to give in this volume a narrative of the doings of the House of Commons during the six years of this Parliament. It will suffice to sum up in a later chapter the remarkable results which were achieved by the energy which Disraeli showed and which he imparted to his capable assistants. He made full use of their service. So long as his health

permitted, he was sedulous in his attendance at the House; but he always left the conduct of a measure almost entirely to the Minister in charge, only interfering at some critical or important juncture. The work of the session of 1874 was much interrupted by the conflict which arose upon the Public Worship Regulation Bill, which embarrassed the Ministry, and brought Gladstone back from his qualified retirement. In the previous year very serious debates had taken place in the House of Lords, initiated by a much respected High Churchman, Lord Redesdale, upon the teachings and practices of certain clergy of the Church of England, who inculcated the duty of auricular confession, and used prayers addressed to the Virgin Mary and other saints; and so strong was the feeling expressed in that House, and evidently shared by the great majority of English Churchmen, that the Archbishops, complaining that under the existing law the prevention of these and other illegalities was difficult and costly, promised to propose remedial legislation. Just ten days before Gladstone announced the coming dissolution of Parliament the Archbishops and Bishops met at Lambeth Palace, and agreed upon the provisions of the Bill which they would introduce into the House of Lords. Before he had been a month in office Disraeli was faced with serious difficulties. He was very reluctant to take part in the coming affray. This was the only question which might threaten the stability of the new Government. On Church questions Cairns and Salisbury were wide as the poles asunder. It was not impossible that Salisbury and Carnarvon might repeat the secession of 1867. And there had already been some difficulty in inducing the Queen to consent to appointments in the household being given to Lord Bath and Lord Beauchamp, who were known to be strong High Churchmen. At the audience at which Disraeli kissed hands as Prime Minister the Queen required as a condition of their

appointments that they should give an undertaking that they would take no part in Church politics. With Lord Bath Disraeli could deal himself, but he was afraid that Beauchamp might throw up the appointment, so he asked Salisbury to see him. 'You might,' he wrote, 'perhaps say things as a friend to him which might be harder to bear from an official chief. I think with tact and a thorough understanding between you and myself, the ship may be steered thro' all these Church and religious sandbanks and shallows, but I see that vigilance is necessary. Greater trials will arise than the appointment of a Lord Steward or a Lord Chamberlain.'

Bishop Magee saw Carnarvon on March 11, and had a talk with him about Church matters. 'He and (I suspect) the Ministry are terribly afraid of Church questions, and wish evidently to let them alone and be let alone about them as long as possible. The latter is impossible.'*

On March 26 Archbishop Tait came to consult Disraeli. On the morning of that day he wrote to Lady Bradford: 'At twelve to-day the Archbishop comes. There falls to me *the hardest nut* to crack that ever was the lot of a Minister. A headstrong step, and it is not only Ministries that would be broken up, but political parties altogether, even the Anglican Church itself. I have no one really to consult with. I can listen to my colleagues, and all they say is worth attention, but they are all prejudiced one way or other.' The Bill as drawn for the Archbishops was, Cairns said, 'full of crudities and unworkable provisions,' and some alterations were suggested by Disraeli and the Chancellor; but they made it clear that these suggestions were made by two Churchmen who wished to be helpful, and that they gave no promise as to the course which would be taken by the Government. The suggestions were adopted unanimously at another meeting of Arch-

* *Life of Archbishop Magee*, ii., 2.

bishops and Bishops, and the amended Bill was introduced in the House of Lords by Archbishop Tait on April 20. Three weeks later it was read a second time without a division. In committee an important amendment was introduced providing for the appointment of a single lay judge to hear representations under the Act. This was adopted by 112 to 13, the two Archbishops and fifteen Bishops voting in the majority. After four nights of discussion in committee the amended Bill was read a third time without a division. The Archbishop had succeeded in giving a right of veto to the Bishop, although in this he was opposed by both Lord Shaftesbury and Lord Salisbury. The Government would not take up the Bill, and the second reading in the House of Commons was moved by a private member, Mr. Russell Gurney, on July 9. Gladstone came back to the fray with six formidable resolutions, each of which might have borne a week's debating, and opposed the Bill in a long and powerful speech. The Queen was much excited. On the morning of the 10th she sent a letter to Disraeli: 'Mr. Disraeli should state to the Cabinet how strongly the Queen feels, and how faithful she is to the Protestant faith, to defend and maintain which her family was placed upon the Throne.' When the debate on the second reading was resumed on July 15, Disraeli made a strong speech in its favour, and its opponents did not venture to divide. Gladstone's resolutions disappeared.

The House, jaded with a long and anxious sitting, was eager to divide. A clear voice made itself heard above the clamour; it was Mr. Hussey Vivian, an old and tried follower of Mr. Gladstone. 'He rose to warn him not to proceed with his resolutions; not twenty men on his own side of the House would follow him into the lobby.' Already deft lieutenants, mournful of aspect, had brought slips of paper to their chief, fraught, it seemed, with no good tidings. When the Speaker put the question there was no

challenge for a division! Amid the roar of mixed cheering and laughter the six resolutions melted away into darkness. They were formally withdrawn next day.'*

There was serious trouble afterwards about an amendment which the Commons put in the Bill and the Lords struck out. The Commons persisted, and in spite of Disraeli's efforts the Lords, led by Lord Salisbury, insisted on their decision. It looked as if at the very last moment the Bill would be lost, and the whole controversy renewed in another session; but a brilliant effort by Disraeli saved the situation and induced the Commons to give way, and the Bill became law.

During the latter part of this session some of the Liberal members, not supported or encouraged by their leaders, entered on the course of obstruction which during many years lowered the character and lessened the efficiency of the House of Commons, and the strain of very late sittings severely tried the health of the Prime Minister. He had also become subject to frequent, and sometimes very serious, attacks of gout. He was resolute in his resistance to obstruction, and on July 30 to 31 was in his place from four o'clock in the afternoon until four o'clock the next morning, when the tired remnant of the obstructionists gave up the contest, and the Bill they desired to defeat was passed. He had a stoical indifference to pain, and would sit for hours on the Treasury bench, with folded arms and undisturbed countenance, when the occasional twitching of a slippered foot was the only evidence of his suffering. During the autumn he had only short intervals of good health. He was ill at Balmoral; he was ill at Bretby; and in December, by the orders of Sir William Jenner and at the urgent advice of the Queen, he went to Bournemouth. He was so ill when he arrived

* *Quarterly Review*, vol. cxxxvii., p. 576. Article by Archbishop Thomson, quoted in *Life of Archbishop Tait*, ii., 213.

there that he had to be carried into the Royal Bath Hotel, where he occupied the fine rooms which his visit has now made almost a place of pilgrimage. It was at Bournemouth that he set the precedent of summoning his colleagues to a Cabinet Council at his temporary place of residence, and it was there that he wrote his famous letters to Alfred Tennyson and Thomas Carlyle, offering to Tennyson a baronetcy, and to Carlyle, whose attacks upon him had been and were afterwards of unmeasured violence, a baronetcy or the Grand Cross of the Bath, with a literary pension such as Johnson and Southey had enjoyed.

The session of 1875 was one in which, from the cause already mentioned, Disraeli did not find it necessary to take part very frequently in the proceedings of the House of Commons. Gladstone had now definitely resigned the leadership of the Liberal party, and Lord Hartington, who was elected in his place, was always reasonable and courteous in his treatment of his opponents. And although a rigid individualism led a few members on the Liberal side to cavil at the social and industrial legislation to which almost the whole time of the House was now devoted, party controversy was delightfully absent from the discussion of the important proposals made and carried into law by the Government.

This was a welcome change to Disraeli, for foreign affairs, which had given little trouble during the year 1874, when his attacks of illness would have made further anxiety too great a burden on his strength, gave an opportunity early in 1875 for a notable example of the firm but peaceful policy which he had throughout his career expounded in his speeches and illustrated by his conduct when in Opposition. Lord Derby was now Foreign Minister. But it is impossible to read the correspondence between them without seeing that in promptitude of decision, and in vigour of action, the Prime Minister was always

in advance of his deliberate and doubting colleague. Early in 1875 came the first opportunity of exerting a peaceful but powerful influence in European politics. Bismarck, who had treated Belgium somewhat roughly, and had, of course, found her easy to deal with, now began to entertain, and even to avow, the intention of renewing hostilities with France. He used language to Odo Russell, the British Minister at Berlin, which showed that there was serious danger to the peace of Europe. The Tsar Alexander, whose daughter had in the previous year married the Duke of Edinburgh, and who had on that occasion paid a friendly and pleasant visit to England, was about to visit Berlin, and it was known that he intended to make some observations to the German Emperor in the cause of peace. The Queen was in some anxiety, and offered to write to the Tsar with the object of strengthening his influence. But Disraeli took a much more definite step.

The Tsar was to arrive at Berlin on Monday, May 10. On Saturday, the 8th, a Cabinet Council was held, and Odo Russell was instructed by telegraph strongly to support the Tsar. The result was that Russell met Bismarck and Gortshakoff at Bismarck's house, and they agreed that the peace of Europe should not be disturbed, and that they would co-operate with England for the maintenance of peace. Bismarck was very angry that England should have suddenly taken up a position against him. France expressed her gratitude for our support. And all the Chancelleries of Europe knew that it was Disraeli's firmness and promptitude which had preserved the peace.

The qualities shown in dealing with this serious peril were again manifested towards the end of the year in the purchase of the Suez Canal shares. The Khedive of Egypt, who owned nearly one-half of the shares, was in severe financial embarrassment, and had given to a French syndicate an option to buy

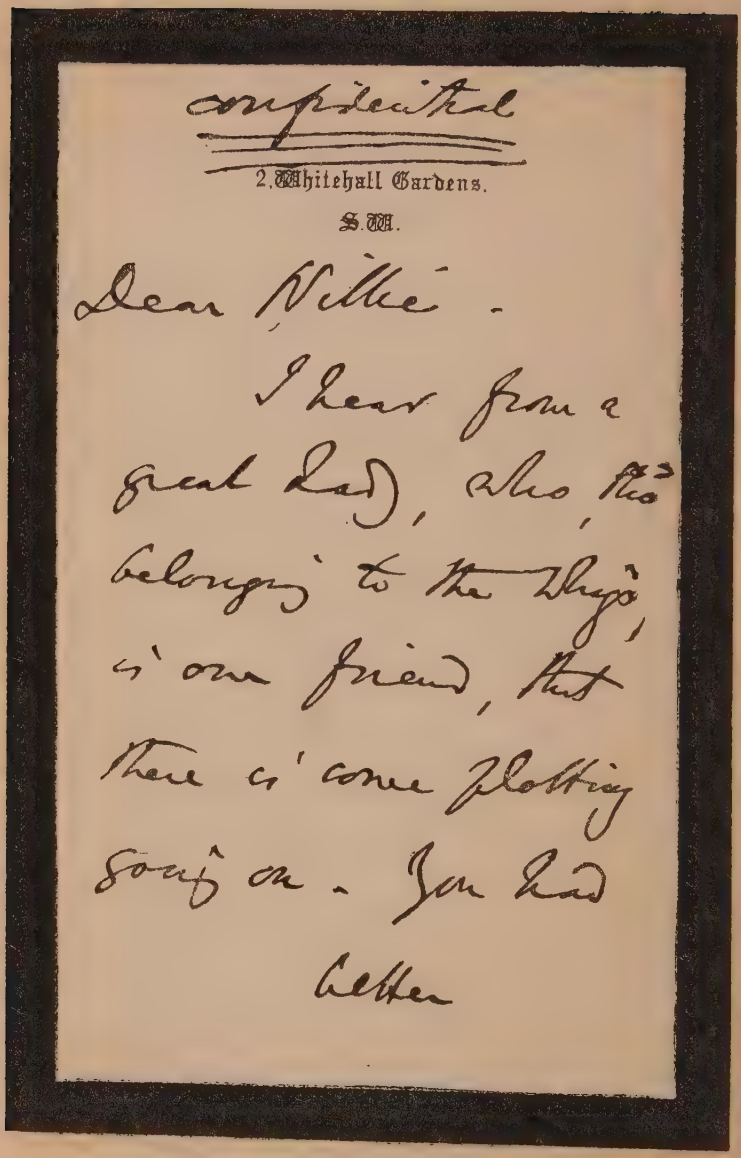
them for £3,680,000, he undertaking to pay for twenty years an interest of 11 per cent., as he had already sold the coupons for that period. The option was to be exercised by Friday, November 19. On Sunday, the 14th, Disraeli probably dined with Baron Lionel de Rothschild, and may have heard something about this. The next day Frederick Greenwood, the brilliant editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, who had himself heard particulars of the scheme at a Sunday evening dinner, called at the Foreign Office and gave Lord Derby the information. Disraeli acted at once. There was some difficulty with Derby, but Disraeli was 'so decided and absolute with him' that he gave way. On Wednesday, the 17th, the Cabinet met and resolved to buy the shares, and their decision was telegraphed to Cairo. A message from the Khedive raised a fresh difficulty. On the morning of the 18th Disraeli wrote a long letter to the Queen. One paragraph ran: 'The Khedive now says that it is absolutely necessary that he should have between three and four million sterling by the 30th of this month! Scarcely breathing time! But the thing must be done. Mr. Disraeli perceives that, in his hurry, he has not expressed himself according to etiquette. Your Majesty will be graciously pleased to pardon him! There is no time to rewrite it. The messenger for Balmoral is waiting.' The Cabinet met again on the day this was written, and there was an hour and a half of debate before Disraeli's insistence prevailed and unanimous agreement was given to the purchase. Montagu Corry waited outside the room, and the moment the decision was arrived at he rushed off to New Court and saw Rothschild, the only man in England who could at once find millions for such a transaction. Probably Disraeli was the only man in Europe for whom he would have done it. He promised to find four millions. It was a large expression of faith, for Parliament would not meet until February, and might refuse to vote the money.

Details were soon arranged. Two millions were provided for the Khedive on December 1, another million on December 16, and the fourth million on January 5. On November 24 Disraeli wrote to the Queen: 'It is just settled; you have it, Madam. . . . The entire interest of the Khedive is yours, Madam.' And the delighted Queen replied: 'This is indeed a great and important event.' Great and important it has indeed proved—a profitable financial investment, and an element of political power which has been of priceless benefit to England in the stormy periods of later years. There was some grumbling in the French newspapers, but the French Government remembered that it was Disraeli who had saved them from war earlier in the year, and the friendly relations between the two countries were not disturbed.

During the later months of this year Disraeli's thoughts were much occupied with Indian questions. In *Tancred*, which was published in 1847, he had put into the lips of the Emir Fakredeen a very remarkable passage: 'Let the Queen of the English . . . transfer the seat of her empire from London to Delhi. There she will find an enormous empire ready-made, a first-rate army, and a large revenue. . . . The only way to manage the Afghans is by Persia and by the Arabs. We will acknowledge the Empress of India as our Suzerain, and secure for her the Levantine coast. If she likes she shall have Alexandria as she now has Malta: it could be arranged.' Ten years later his speeches on the Indian Mutiny and the Canning dispatch emphasised the necessity of drawing closer the personal relations of the Sovereign and the princes and people of her Indian dominions. This he had done in 1858, when the transfer was made from the East India Company to the direct authority of the Crown, and Lord Stanley was made Secretary of State for India. The suggestion was then made that this important change should be accompanied by some addition to the royal title, but nothing was done.

Now in 1875 the wish of the Prince of Wales to visit India offered an excellent opportunity of carrying forward Disraeli's policy. The Queen at first was not in favour of the visit. She did not like the idea of the Prince holding a Royal Durbar and an investiture of the Star of India. But she yielded to Disraeli's persuasion, and the visit was in every respect successful. The Prince performed his part admirably. He visited many princes, and exchanged the accustomed presents, and his dignity at state functions and unaffected friendliness in less formal circumstances had a lasting and very valuable influence in strengthening the loyalty of our Indian fellow-subjects. The Queen was anxious for the new title which the Prime Minister desired to give her, and when she opened Parliament in person, after a lapse of five years, the royal speech expressed much satisfaction with the success of the Indian visit, and announced that a Bill would be introduced to sanction an addition to the royal style and title. The vote for the purchase of the Suez Canal shares provoked some criticism, but was passed without a division. To the Royal Titles Bill there was angry and violent opposition. Gladstone came down, and made a fierce attack upon it, but Hartington would not support him, and the second reading was carried by 284 to 31, Gladstone not voting at all. But even that large majority did not end the struggle, which went on until May, and gave Disraeli a great deal of trouble. On May 5 he wrote to Lady Bradford: 'I am tired and sad. The session has been one of extraordinary exhaustion and anxiety, and the burthen has fallen on myself.' The final division was on May 11, and gave the Government a majority of 108 (334 to 226). 'I rose,' wrote Disraeli, 'past midnight with a racking headache, and ought to have disgraced myself, but did not.'

During the rest of the month he was seriously unwell, and the Cabinets were held at his house in Whitehall Gardens, as he could not venture to cross the road to



confidential

2, Whitehall Gardens.

S.W.

Dear Nellie.

I hear from a great Lad, who has belongs to the Whigs, is one friend, that there is some plotting going on. You had better

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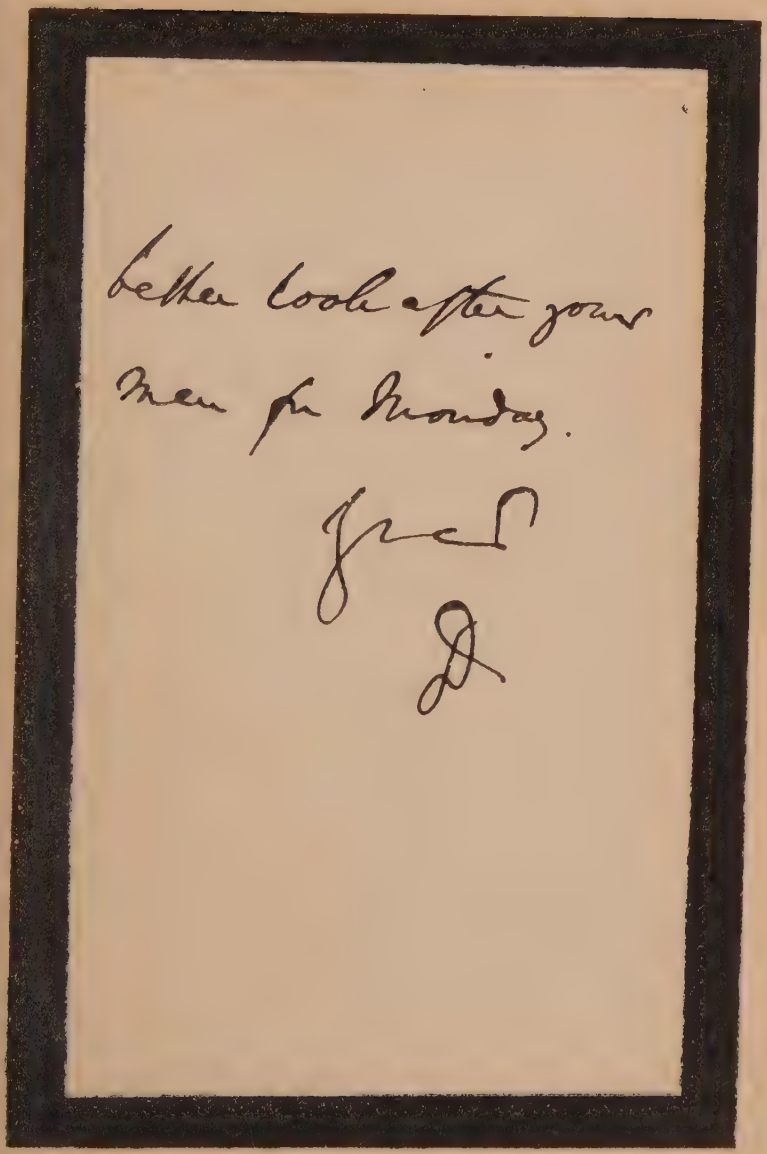

LETTER

Rt. Hon. Sir William Hart Dyke, Bart.

Downing Street. The Queen became very uneasy, and kept telegraphing for bulletins, and begging him to see Sir William Jenner, who could tell her of his condition. Sir William's reports were serious, and on June 5 she wrote offering him a peerage. He told her that he would not be able to continue his work in the House of Commons in another session, and that he would prefer to retire from office. Against this the Queen protested. Disraeli made some inquiries and found that his retirement might have serious consequences, so he reconsidered the matter, and wrote to some of his chief colleagues stating that he was prepared, 'as an act of duty to Her Majesty and to his colleagues,' to accept the peerage and to go to the House of Lords as Prime Minister, and he asked their advice, saying, 'My only motive now is the maintenance of the Ministry and the party, and to secure these I am ready still to try to serve them, or cheerfully altogether to disappear.' There was no disagreement among the members of the Cabinet. The necessity of his leaving the House of Commons was quite clear; no one would listen to the suggestion of his retirement from office. In June and July his health was somewhat better, and he bore up bravely against the fatigues of the House of Commons, showing to others no sign of weakness in the three or four speeches he was compelled to make on foreign affairs, although in his severe self-judgement he complained after one of these speeches that he had 'lacked energy, and therefore fluency and clearness and consecutivenes of ideas.'

On July 30 Hartington said that he had no desire to put on record any condemnation of the Government, and that he thought in the main their policy was right. But news came pouring in of atrocities committed by Turkish troops in putting down an insurrection in Bulgaria, and on the last night of the session, in a debate for which the Appropriation Bill gave an opportunity, an attack was made on the

Cabinet for their support and sympathy with Turkey. Disraeli closed the discussion, and the final passages of his speech deserve quotation:

We are, it is true, the allies of the Sultan of Turkey; so is Russia, so is Austria, so is France, and so are others. We are also their partners in a tripartite treaty, in which we not only generally, but singly, guarantee with France and Austria the territorial integrity of Turkey. These are our engagements, and they are the engagements that we endeavour to fulfil.

* * * * *

Sir, we refused to join in the Berlin note because we were convinced that if we made that step we should very soon see a material interference in Turkey; and we were not of opinion that by a system of material guarantees the great question which the honourable and learned gentleman has adverted to would be solved either for the general welfare of the world or for the interests of England, which, after all, must be our sovereign care. The Government of the Porte was never for a moment misled by the arrival of the British fleet in Besika Bay. They were perfectly aware, when that fleet came there, that it was not to prop up any decaying and obsolete Government, nor did its presence there sanction any of those enormities which are the subjects of our painful discussion to-night. What may be the fate of the eastern part of Europe it would be arrogant for me to speculate upon, and if I had any thoughts on the subject I trust I should not be so imprudent or so indiscreet as to take this opportunity to express them. But I am sure that as long as England is ruled by English parties who understand the principles on which our Empire is founded, and who are resolved to maintain that Empire, our influence in that part of the world can never be looked upon with indifference. If it should happen that the Government which controls the greater portion of those fair lands is found to be incompetent for its purpose, neither England nor any of the Great Powers will shrink from fulfilling the high political and moral duty which will then devolve upon them.

But, Sir, we must not jump at conclusions so quickly

as is now the fashion. There is nothing to justify us in talking in such a vein of Turkey as has, and is being at this moment entertained. The present is a state of affairs which requires the most vigilant examination and the most careful management. But those who suppose that England ever would uphold, or at this moment particularly is upholding, Turkey from blind superstition and from a want of sympathy with the highest aspirations of humanity are deceived. What our duty is at this critical moment is to maintain the Empire of England. Nor will we ever agree to any step, though it may obtain for a moment comparative quiet and a false prosperity, that hazards the existence of that Empire.

They were his last words in the House of Commons. When the Speaker left the chair, the Prime Minister walked down the House to the lobby and looked around him and shook hands with some friends. His unusual conduct was explained when the next morning, August 12, 1876, the newspapers announced that he had become the Earl of Beaconsfield.

The retirement of Disraeli from office at this time would indeed have produced serious results. It would almost certainly have involved the break-up of the Government, which was already disturbed by differences of opinion among members of the Cabinet upon the difficult questions of foreign policy, which were daily becoming more urgent. His removal to the Upper House took place exactly at the right time. The dominant consideration was, of course, his precarious health. But there was no longer need for his constant presence and direction in the House of Commons. No constitutional changes were under consideration, and the promise of useful social and industrial legislation had been faithfully kept. Many valuable statutes had come into force, and not much remained to be done except the amendment and consolidation of the Factory Acts, which was carried through in 1878. In this Parliament more than twenty measures of this class were passed. To give

a list of them by their Parliamentary titles would be wasting space and giving little information; it may be permissible to quote from a by-election address of 1880 a brief statement of their general effect:

During the past six sessions between twenty and thirty Acts have been passed into law by the exertions of the Ministry, which have directly and substantially contributed to the health, education, and social welfare of the people.

The administration of the law has been rendered more simple and more speedy; the prosecution of criminals has been assumed as the duty of the state instead of being left to the revenge of the victim of the crime; the right to a trial by jury has been widely extended; the unnecessary and costly imprisonment for small offences has been greatly lessened; the treatment of criminals undergoing imprisonment has been rendered uniform.

The laws relating to public health have been consolidated and improved; municipalities have received powers to remove unhealthy dwellings. Rivers have been protected from pollution and commons from enclosure; and the Factories Act of 1874 and the Factories and Workshops Act of 1878 completed a series of Acts which have given comfort to the homes of working men, and saved their children from the evils of premature toil.

The relations between employers and employed have been improved by the Acts of 1875, and the real grievance which working men suffered under the law of conspiracy, as then expounded, was removed in that year; in the same year the statute was passed under which friendly societies have been able to reorganise themselves on a safer basis than before; and the Agricultural Holdings Act secured to every tenant who had no written contract with his landlord compensation for what he had put upon the farm, and an ample term of notice before he could be made to quit possession.*

It is not surprising that in 1879 Alexander Macdonald, one of the first Labour members of the House

* Sir Edward Clarke, *The Story of my Life*, p. 159.

of Commons, should have declared that the Conservatives had done more for the working classes in five years than the Liberals had done in fifty.*

* The article on English history in the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* has the strange statement that "in legislation the Ministry attempted little and accomplished less." This requires correction.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS

At the opening of the session of 1877 the Prime Minister took his seat in the House of Lords, and at once undertook the duties of leader of the House. It was unquestionably a great advantage to him and to the country that he thus came into the closest personal association with Derby and Salisbury, who, in regard to the questions of foreign policy which during this year almost engrossed the attention of the Cabinet, were his most important colleagues. The ties of friendship between Disraeli and Derby were very strong, and Disraeli had looked forward to the time when Derby would succeed to the leadership, which illness and old age must at no distant time compel him to surrender. But it needed the constant exercise of all his tact and firmness to retain in the Government the experience and the valuable political influence of his old ally, and to inspire him with something of his own energy and courage.

The diplomatic history of the two years from the middle of 1876 to the middle of 1878 is a tangled maze of notes, conferences, protocols, private assurances, and secret conversations, the whole history of which is set out in Buckle's *Life of Disraeli* with the fullest detail from letters and memoranda, and even from notes made at Cabinet Councils. The student of history will learn from those interesting pages the real difficulty which Disraeli had to meet. His policy was clear, and he never wavered in his resolve to carry it out. In 1871, by the Treaty of London, the Treaty of Paris of 1856 had been reaffirmed by the Great Powers, and it provided for the independence and the territorial integrity of the Turkish Empire

He was resolved not to permit the abrogation or modification of that treaty except by a congress of the Powers who were parties to it, at which the interests and treaty rights of Great Britain should be upheld by her representatives. And he held that the maintenance of Turkish authority at Constantinople was essential to British interests in the East.

In maintaining that policy he had throughout the sessions of 1877 and 1878 the support of both Houses of Parliament. In the Lords there was no difficulty. In the Commons, where the party majority of the Government was only fifty-two, the first test of the feeling of the House was in May of 1877. On April 24 the Emperor of Russia declared war upon Turkey, and a fortnight later Gladstone rushed down upon the House with his usual sheaf of resolutions. It was soon seen that the Bulgarian atrocity campaign, although it had done much mischief by weakening the hands of the Government, and by misleading the foreign chancellories as to the feeling of the people of England, had failed of any lasting effect. When the resolutions came to be debated, Sir Richard Cross (an excellent choice) made a powerful speech, and on May 14 the Opposition leaders, who had been with difficulty induced to support Gladstone, were defeated by a majority of 131 (354 to 223).

It had been hoped and expected by Russia that their army would have a swift and easy progress to Constantinople. They were grievously disappointed. For five months the gallant defence of Plevna stayed their advance. And in England the stories which came in month by month of the valour of the ill-paid and ill-fed Turkish troops did much to strengthen the current of public opinion, which was now setting strongly in favour of the Prime Minister's policy. In December Plevna was at last taken; and without delay, but at the cost of eventually losing two of its members, Derby and Carnarvon, the Government prepared for war. In February the British fleet was

sent into the Sea of Marmora to lie off Constan'inople, and a vote of £6,000,000 was passed by a majority of 194 (328 to 134). A body of Indian troops were brought to Malta, and the House supported the Government action by a majority of 121 (347 to 226). And in April the reserves were called out, and this, the final and decisive step, was approved in the House of Commons by a majority of 246 (310 to 64). There was no doubt now that Disraeli's policy would be sustained by a united people, and negotiations for peace, direct and indirect, were soon on foot.

On June 3 Germany issued invitations to a congress to be held at Berlin at which the Treaty of San Stefano, to which the Turks under the pressure of irresistible force had submitted in March, should be laid before the signatories of the Treaty of London, and every article of the Treaty of San Stefano should be considered. Bismarck, acting in taking this important step with the reluctant consent of Russia, was playing his favourite part of the honest broker.

In achieving this great result, which was almost a guarantee of peace, Disraeli, as we have seen, had been supported by Parliament. His difficulties had not lain in the House of Commons, but in his own Cabinet. For two years and a half, while dealing with social and industrial legislation and finance, and the administration of home and colonial affairs, its meetings had been quite harmonious. But when in 1876 the peace of Europe was disturbed, and it became necessary to decide upon a definite policy in Eastern affairs, serious differences of opinion showed themselves. Derby and Carnarvon were very reluctant to take any steps which appeared to promise support to Turkey in the event of an attack upon her by Russia, and they were not without some measure of support from Salisbury. The declaration of war by Russia in April, 1877, brought these differences to a sharp issue. The proof given by the very large

majority in the division on Gladstone's resolutions that Parliament would support the Ministry in a firm policy had no effect upon Derby, and a week later Disraeli wrote to him a very serious remonstrance:

HUGHENDEN,
May 22, 1877.

I think affairs look very bad for us, and that some other body will yet fall before the Ottoman Empire tumbles. The tactics of the Opposition are clear; they were laid down by Harcourt in the debate. He distinctly laid the ground for an appeal to the country against the Ministry, whose want of foresight and courage will have compelled us to acquiesce either in a ruinous war or a humiliating peace. Having successfully acted on a nervous and divided Cabinet, and prevented anything being done, they will now turn round and say, 'This is the way you protect British interests!' They will probably turn us out in this Parliament, or they will force us to a dissolution under the influence of a disastrous defeat abroad. . . . A Government can only die once: it is better to die with glory than vanish in an ignominious end. The country would still rally round British interests; in three months' time British interests will be in the mud. I have written this with difficulty, for my hand has relapsed.

Derby's only answer to this was: 'You have been so often right when others were wrong that I hardly like to express dissent, but I am quite sure that in the middle class at least the feeling is so strong against war that you would lose more support by asking money for an expedition than you could gain by the seizure of an important military position.'

On the morning which brought this unsatisfactory answer Disraeli had received a letter from Cairns urging that 'we had defined British interests and said we would protect them, and are not taking any real step for their protection.'

Disraeli at this time was in a pitiable condition of health.

He wrote to Derby again on May 25:

The Lord Chancellor wants the Cabinet to be called together again, and to review the situation again, preliminarily to a final decision. I suppose it will break up. . . . I hope you will be able to make this out, but I am very suffering, feet and hands.

Derby's answer to this was characteristic:

FOREIGN OFFICE.

I will do as you like, but I do not see what there is to discuss in the present state of affairs. And I doubt as to the wisdom of 'talking over' things when no action is possible. Men only work each other up into a state of agitation, and are then ready to rush into anything rash to relieve it. Why does not Cairns tell us the points which he wants considered?

The immediate difficulty was got over, and a month later Disraeli was able to report to the Queen that a Cabinet meeting had been quite satisfactory. In July friendly communications passed between the Government and Hartington, whose leadership was not now interfered with, and who wished to act in concert with the Government.

The close of the session found Disraeli seriously ill. He wrote to a friend from Whitehall Gardens on August 16:

I have been very ill and continue very ill, and am really quite incapable of walking upstairs; gout and bronchitis have ended in asthma, the horrors of which I have never contemplated or conceived. I have seen more than one person die, but I don't think they suffered the oppression and despair which I have sometimes to encounter; and sometimes I am obliged to sit up all night, and want of sleep at last breaks me down. Nothing but the critical state of affairs has kept me at my post, but if I die at it I cannot desert it now. I have managed to attend every Cabinet, but I can't walk at present from Whitehall to Downing Street, but am obliged to brougham even that step, which I once could have repeated fifty times a day.

Directly Parliament rose he went to Hughenden and very slowly got back something of his much-needed strength. When he arrived he was obliged to have a pony carriage to take him up the slight steep from the church to the house. By September 6 he was able to report that he could walk. In October he spent three weeks at Brighton, and there had some interesting and useful conversations with Schouvaloff, who sought him out, and with apparent candour described Bismarck as being complete master. 'Russia and Austria,' he said, 'are moved about by him like the pieces at chess.' Disraeli told Schouvaloff that if there were a second campaign it would be impossible for England to continue her state of neutrality.

The fall of Plevna on December 9, 1877, and the necessity of at once taking steps to prepare for the war into which England might be forced to enter brought back all the Ministerial troubles. A Cabinet was summoned for Friday, the 14th, and Disraeli then proposed that Parliament should be summoned immediately, that the military and naval forces should be considerably increased, and that an offer of mediation should at once be made to the belligerents.

No agreement was come to, or seemed probable, and the Cabinet adjourned until Monday.

On the Saturday the Queen, who desired to give public evidence of her confidence in her Prime Minister, paid a visit to Hughenden; Princess Beatrice and two or three members of the royal household were with her. Disraeli and Montagu Corry met them at High Wycombe, where an address was read, and then the royal party drove to the house, where lunch was served. The Queen stayed for about two hours, and before they left she and the Princess each planted a tree. It was a signal honour such as the Queen had not paid to any of her Prime Ministers since she visited Lord Melbourne thirty-six years earlier. Coming at this critical time, it had undoubtedly a

strong influence upon public opinion in Disraeli's favour, but it did not at once have effect upon the Cabinet. When they reassembled on the Monday a stormy meeting, which lasted for two hours and a half, ended with the announcement by Disraeli that he would tender his resignation to the Queen. This gave pause to the dissentients, and the meeting was adjourned to the next day. That morning, an hour before the Ministers reassembled, Derby came to Disraeli and said he had proposals to make which he wished the Cabinet to consider before an absolute rupture was decided on. The Cabinet met, and Derby made his proposals. Salisbury said that if anything was to be done he preferred the proposals of the Prime Minister, and Disraeli was able to report to the Queen when he dined that night at Windsor that his three resolutions had been unanimously approved.

The note to Lady Bradford was less formal:

[*Most Private.*] 10, Downing Street,
December 19. 1877.

The great struggle is over, and I have triumphed.

On Monday night there was virtually no Government, but on Tuesday the recusants fell upon their knees and surrendered at discretion.

There were difficult meetings of the Cabinet from time to time, but by coaxing or coercion Disraeli kept his colleagues together, and when Parliament met on January 17, 1878, the passage in the Queen's speech represented the policy of a still united Government; and Disraeli reported to the Queen with great satisfaction that Lord Salisbury had in the debate in the Lords given him vigorous, loyal, and uncompromising support.

Three days later the Queen wrote to Disraeli offering him the vacant Garter, the greatest honour it was in her power to bestow, as a mark of her confidence and support.

The letter in which he refused the offer cannot be omitted from this biography:

10, Downing Street,
January 21, 1878.

He is deeply touched, almost overcome, by the gracious expression of your Majesty's wish to confer on him the high dignity of the Garter, and especially as a mark of your Majesty's confidence and support.

But with the profoundest deference he would venture to observe that this great distinction would only add to the jealousy and envy of which he is already the object, and that it might be better to reserve it for someone on whom your Majesty could less depend than on himself, and whose support might add strength to your Majesty's Government.

There is no honour and no reward that with him can ever equal the possession of your Majesty's kind thoughts. All his own thoughts and feelings and duties and affections are now concentrated on your Majesty, and he desires nothing more for his remaining years than to serve your Majesty, or, if that service ceases, to live still on its memory as a period of his existence most interesting and fascinating.

There can be no doubt that Disraeli was thinking of Lord Derby when he described the person to whom this high honour might usefully be offered. His personal authority and territorial influence were so great that his secession from the Government at this moment would have seriously weakened it both at home and abroad. Disraeli was resolved on more effective action than Derby would support, and at the same time desired to keep Derby in the Cabinet until the House of Commons should have given a definite sanction to his policy. He succeeded in both. At first it appeared that he would fail. On January 23, 1878, the Cabinet decided that the fleet then lying in Besika Bay should proceed at once to Constantinople, and that in the House of Commons notice should be given of a vote of credit. Derby and Carnarvon resigned. Carnarvon was allowed to go, but a few

days later, upon strong representations by his colleagues, Disraeli, through Northcote, made earnest appeal to Derby, and he returned, and for two months longer attended the Cabinet Councils.

An incident which occurred at this time showed how close the friendship between the Queen and her Prime Minister was becoming. A long and very serious letter had to be written to the Queen to induce her to consent to Derby's resumption of office, and Disraeli began the letter: 'Madam, and most beloved Sovereign—I fear your Majesty will never pardon me for writing to your Majesty this letter, but my duty to your Majesty compels me, and I entreat your Majesty to extend to me your Majesty's commanding judgement and infinite indulgence.'

The reply, which gave reluctant consent, began: 'My dear Lord Beaconsfield,—I answer you as you kindly addressed me, and as I hope you will do whenever it is easier, which it undoubtedly is.' And it concluded: 'Hoping to hear soon, believe me, with the sincerest regard, Yours aff'ly, V. R. and I."

The further course of Cabinets need not be followed. From this point there was no serious trouble, and at the end of two months, when the vote of credit had been passed by the emphatic majority of 194, and his continuance in office had ceased to be important, Lord Derby went and Salisbury succeeded to his place.

There had, of course, been moments of keen anxiety, one of which may be here recorded in words spoken by W. H. Smith at Maristow a few years later. Smith had become First Lord of the Admiralty on the death of Ward Hunt in July, 1877.

There was one day in my official life which was enough to turn my hair grey. An important resolution, involving possibly a European war, had been taken by the Cabinet, and I had to telegraph instructions to Hornby, the Admiral commanding our fleet. To make sure of delivery and to prevent the risk of

mistake, I sent the message by three different routes, in cypher, of course. The next day, Sunday, I went to service at the Chapel Royal, Whitehall, and while I was there the messenger came for me with the red box, and I came out to find a telegram from the Admiral with the word 'not' left out. I sent the true message off by the same route, and in the afternoon I got a telegram to say that the other two had been delivered in the right words, and that he had acted on the real instructions. It was a time of great strain; we had an extra room at the Admiralty, and two clerks were there night and day. One Sunday—and Sundays were always the most harassing and anxious days—we began sending messages at six in the morning and did not finish until two on Monday morning. Of course, I used to go across to Disraeli before sending any special message.

Germany's invitation to a congress at Berlin was issued with the consent of the British Cabinet, which had decided two days before to take part in the congress and to be represented there by the Prime Minister and Lord Salisbury.

The Cabinet had not come to this decision without assuring itself by separate and confidential negotiation that there was reasonable hope of a peaceful settlement.

When Bismarck proposed the congress he suggested, with the knowledge and consent of the Tsar, that England and Russia should have some kind of understanding as to the points which each would regard as essential. Conversations with Schouvaloff resulted in a note of the modifications in the Treaty of San Stefano desired by this country being taken by him to St. Petersburg to be considered by the Tsar. Most of these were accepted by Russia, and a memorandum showing the extent of the general agreement was signed by Salisbury and Schouvaloff on May 30.

Austria received an assurance that England would support her claims.

And a convention with Turkey was signed by

Layard at Constantinople on June 4, by which it was agreed that if Russia should insist on retaining Batoum, Ardahan, and Kars, or any of them, the British Government would defend by force of arms the Sultan's Asiatic dominions, as demarcated by the congress, against any fresh Russian attack.

Cyprus* passed into English occupation and administration, subject to certain annual payments.

* 'The English want Cyprus, and they will take it as compensation' (*Tancred*, Book IV., chap. i.).

CHAPTER XXVIII

PEACE WITH HONOUR

The appointment of Plenipotentiaries to the Berlin Congress was the occasion of an unusual and interesting intervention of the Prince of Wales in political affairs. On May 28 he wrote to the Queen:

I had occasion to see Mr. M. Corry to-day on several matters, and in the course of conversation we discussed the chances of a congress becoming daily more likely, and as to who was going to represent England. I said, of course, Lord Beaconsfield was the only man who could go. . . . I understand that P. Bismarck particularly begs that there should be no *ad referendum*.

Under these circumstances, it strikes me more forcibly than ever that the Prime Minister is not only the right man to represent us at a congress, but the only man who can go, as he would show Russia and the other Powers that we were really in earnest.

It struck me that if you wrote a mem. which was to be laid before the Cabinet, in which you expressed your positive desire that Lord B. should go, the matter would then be settled.

The Queen was uneasy lest the journey to Berlin should be too severe a trial for Disraeli's health, and wished the congress should meet at Paris, Brussels, or the Hague. But this could not be arranged, and she gave a somewhat nervous consent to his going. He left London on June 8, and travelled by easy stages. He slept at Calais, and on the next day, Sunday, went on to Brussels, and that evening dined with the King and Queen of the Belgians at the palace. On Monday he went on to Cologne, and at eight o'clock in the evening of Tuesday (11th) he arrived at Berlin, where rooms had been reserved for

him at the Kaiserhof Hotel. He had more freedom there than he would have had at the British Embassy to make arrangements for the private interviews with the foreign diplomatists, which he considered of at least as much importance as the formal sittings of the congress. He had not been at the hotel half an hour when a message came from Prince Bismarck asking to have an interview at once. At a quarter to ten he was at Bismarck's house, and the two statesmen had a frank and friendly talk. Sixteen years had passed since they last met, and the events of those years had made them unquestionably the two most powerful men in the councils of Europe. Bismarck, with the entire agreement of Disraeli, had insisted that this should be a congress of Plenipotentiaries, and that there should be no *ad referendum*. Now they discussed and agreed what the course of the congress should be, that the great questions which involved the issue of peace or war should be taken up and dealt with first, and the smaller but by no means insignificant matters raised by the provisions of the Treaty of San Stefano should be left over until it was seen whether the congress would be successful in solving the chief differences. 'These smaller matters,' said Bismarck, 'concern Austria, and I wish to serve Austria, but Austria is not going to war with Russia. Let us therefore deal with the great things which concern England, for England is quite ready to go to war with Russia.' The German Emperor, upon whose life an attempt had shortly before been made, was not able to receive the Plenipotentiaries, and the duty devolved on the Crown Prince and Princess, who gave Disraeli a cordial welcome when they received him and Lord Salisbury the next morning half an hour earlier than the representatives of the other Powers.

The congress met at the Radetsky Palace on the afternoon of Thursday (13th), and Prince Bismarck was appointed President. The business was chiefly

formal, for the Turkish envoys had been shipwrecked in the Black Sea, and an adjournment was made to the following Monday.

That night there was a gala banquet at the old palace, at which Disraeli, Bismarck, Andrassy, and Schouvaloff were seated opposite the royal family. The Crown Prince and Princess drank to the health of the Queen of England, and Disraeli made acknowledgment. With a momentary forgetfulness of the Queen's feelings he reported to her that it was the most splendid scene he had ever witnessed.

The next morning Disraeli had an important interview with Schouvaloff. Gortshakoff, the chief Russian representative, ' a shrivelled old man,' left the effective work of the congress to his colleague.

The diary which Disraeli kept for the Queen, and sent her in instalments, describes what passed:

June 14.—This morning he had a long interview by request with Count Schouvaloff, who, it appears, was rather frightened by the tone, or reported tone, of Lord B. The point was respecting the political and military control by the Sultan over the southern province of Bulgaria. The Russians propose that the Sultan should not be permitted to employ his own army in the government of this part of his dominions. This is outrageous, and to give the Sultan the line of the Balkans for his frontier, and not permit him to fortify and defend them, is monstrous and a gross insult to England. Lord B. spoke thunder about it. It will be given up by St. Petersburg.

The week-end was pleasantly spent by Disraeli and Salisbury at Potsdam as the guests of the Crown Prince and Princess, who gave a great banquet on the Sunday (16th) to which all the Plenipotentiaries were invited.

The second meeting of the congress was on Monday (17th) afternoon, and the Turkish envoys being present, and the congress in full session, the question of the boundaries of Bulgaria, which the President declared to be the most important question and the

most difficult, was brought forward. The article of the Treaty of San Stefano was read, and Disraeli at once proposed two resolutions which would entirely set aside the concessions upon this subject made by Turkey in that treaty. The resolutions were:

1. That the chain of the Balkans should be the new frontier of Turkey.

2. That in the country south of the Balkans the Sultan should exercise a real political and military power.

The diary continues:

The Russian P.P. disputed both these propositions; recommended a division of Bulgaria by a longitudinal line, and that the Turkish troops should not be permitted to enter the province, which the Russian P.P. styled 'South Bulgaria.' After discussion, P. Bismarck adjourned the question till Wednesday, remarking that, in the interval, the Powers most interested should confer together. This is the system on which His Highness manages the conference, and it is a practical one. All questions are publicly introduced, and then privately settled.

The next morning the Russian and Austrian envoys met Disraeli and Salisbury at the British Embassy, and an important discussion took place. Disraeli firmly repeated the declaration that he had made to Schouvaloff at Brighton, and to the mortification of the Russians he was supported by Austria. After four hours of discussion ('nearly the severest four hours I can well recall,' said Disraeli) Schouvaloff accepted the first resolution, and the Balkan frontier was agreed to. But although the congress was not *ad referendum*, he said that the second resolution was so serious that he could not accept it without direct instructions from the Tsar. So no settlement was arrived at.

The next day, Wednesday (19th), the congress met, but Schouvaloff had no instructions, so no business was done, and a delay of forty-eight hours was granted

to the Russian envoys that they might send a special messenger to the Tsar.

On Thursday (20th) the Ambassadors again met at the British Embassy, but only to hear that no answer had come from the Tsar, and that the messenger would probably return before the forty-eight hours' delay expired on Friday evening.

On the Friday morning Disraeli walked *unter den Linden* with Montagu Corry, and gave him instructions to arrange for a special train which would be ready at very short notice to take the British representatives to Calais, as war would follow the failure of the congress.

The rest of the story of this critical day must be told in Disraeli's own words:

Friday, June 21.—I was engaged to-day to dine at a grand party at the English Embassy; but about 5 o'clock Prince Bismarck called on me and asked how we were getting on, and expressed his anxiety, and threw out some plans for a compromise, such as limiting the troops of the Sultan, etc.

I told him that in London we had compromised this question in deference to the feelings of the Emperor of Russia, and it was impossible to recede. 'Am I to understand it is an ultimatum?' 'You are.' 'I am obliged to go to the Crown Prince now. We should talk over this matter. Where do you dine to-day?' 'At the English Embassy.' 'I wish you could dine with me. I am alone at 6 o'clock.'

I accepted his invitation, sent my apology to Lady Odo, dined with Bismarck, the Princess, his daughter, his married niece, and his sons. After dinner we retired to another room, where he smoked and I followed his example. I believe I gave the last blow to my shattered constitution, but I felt it absolutely necessary. I had an hour and a half of the most interesting conversation, entirely political; he was convinced that the ultimatum was not a sham, and before I went to bed I had the satisfaction of knowing that St. Petersburg had surrendered.

At half-past ten the next morning Disraeli sent two telegrams, one to the Queen, and one to the

Chancellor of the Exchequer: 'Russia surrenders and accepts the English scheme for the European frontier of the Empire, and its military and political rule by the Sultan. B[ismarc]k says: "There is again a Turkey in Europe."' The Queen replied: 'It is all due to your energy and firmness.'

It was a decisive success, which preserved the peace of Europe. No one at Berlin doubted to whom the good result was owing. Gortschakoff groaned: 'We have sacrificed a hundred thousand picked soldiers and a hundred millions of money for an illusion.' Bismarck's judgement was characteristically expressed in the phrase: 'The old Jew, that is the man.'

There remained much for the congress to do, and Disraeli, though his health was failing, attended every meeting, and took a vigorous part in the debates upon Batoum and Kars; but having entire confidence in Salisbury he left to him the arduous and responsible duty of dealing with troublesome details which affected Greece and Italy and Montenegro. At last, at a lengthy meeting of the congress on July 8, he arranged with Gortschakoff a satisfactory compromise upon the question of Batoum, the last difficulty, which had involved some danger of a failure to make a complete settlement.

He bore up until then, but when Corry saw him just after he returned to the hotel he found him so suffering and prostrate that he was seriously alarmed, and telegraphed to England to Dr. Kidd, begging him to come to Berlin at once. The four weeks of unceasing business and pleasure which he had spent in Berlin might well have tried the endurance of a younger and stronger man. The formal meetings of congress, which he had regularly attended, were to him not more fatiguing than the state banquets at the palace or Potsdam, or those given by Prince Bismarck, or by himself and the representatives of the other Powers. But firm in his belief in the supreme importance of personal influence and private conversa-

tions, he was indefatigable in his attendance at these formal festivities, and at the social receptions, where, directly or indirectly, he could bring upon the members of the congress the impression of his clear and unswerving resolve. And no doubt he enjoyed his personal popularity. The presence of a great statesman who was also a great novelist deeply interested the fashionable society of Berlin. He found all the ladies reading his books, especially *Henrietta Temple*, which, as Disraeli said, ' being a love story and written forty years ago, is hardly becoming an Envoy Extraordinary.' The libraries bought up all the Tauchnitz editions of his works, and the booksellers had to telegraph to England for more copies of all his novels.

On the Tuesday, July 9, the courageous invalid was a little better, and managed to attend the final business meeting of the congress; but when Dr. Kidd arrived on the Wednesday an attack of gout had supervened, and he was ordered to keep his bed on the Thursday in the hope that he would be able to attend the signing of the treaty on the Friday. This he was fortunately well enough to do, and, leaving Berlin on Saturday morning under Dr. Kidd's care, and again breaking the journey at Cologne and Calais, he reached London in fair health on the evening of Tuesday (16th), bringing the treaty with him.

No formal reception was arranged for the returning envoy, but the enthusiasm of the public welcome was all the more impressive. Dense crowds were gathered at Charing Cross and in Whitehall, and it was with some difficulty that the open carriage made its way to Downing Street, where the cheering was again and again renewed until Disraeli came to the window and declared they had brought back ' Peace with honour.'

Queen and people joined in endorsing the claim and rewarding the successful envoys. The Queen would have liked to give Disraeli a dukedom, but he declined, and she now insisted on his accepting the

Garter, and at his urgent request the same high honour was given to Salisbury.

Only two days after his return Disraeli in a long and powerful speech explained to the House of Lords the details of the settlement made by the treaty, and it was approved without a division. In the Commons the Liberal leaders, 'willing to wound and yet afraid to strike,' proposed a shuffling sort of amendment which, in spite of Gladstone's efforts, was defeated by a majority of 143 (338 to 195).

The corporation of the city of London entertained the envoys at a banquet, and conferred upon them both the freedom of the city. A great banquet at the Knightsbridge Riding School and the reception of addresses at the Foreign Office from nearly a thousand Conservative Associations showed the satisfaction of the party which Disraeli so long and so brilliantly led.

He had indeed become—

> 'On Fortune's crowning slope,
> The pillar of a people's hope,
> The centre of a world's desire.'

There is one flaw, but only one, in the pleasant story. In a speech at Southwark Gladstone had spoken of the convention which had been signed at Constantinople on June 4 as an 'insane covenant,' and Disraeli, in his speech at the Riding School, quoted this phrase, and said:

I would put this issue to an English jury. Which do you believe most likely to enter into an insane convention, a body of English gentlemen honoured by the favour of their Sovereign and the confidence of their fellow-subjects, managing your affairs for five years, I hope with prudence, and not altogether without success, or a sophistical rhetorician, inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity, and gifted with an egotistical imagination that can at all times command an interminable and inconsistent series of arguments to malign an opponent and to glorify himself?

The sentence in which Gladstone was described was, of course, cheered at the banquet, but when it appeared in the papers a storm broke out. Liberals shrieked their indignation, and some of Disraeli's best friends sighed their regret. It was so unlike his usual dignity and self-command. The 'sophistical rhetorician' could not be complained of; it was apt and accurate. But the words which followed were unworthy of the speaker.

It must be remembered that there was great provocation.

The earlier chapters of this book have shown with what generous and self-sacrificing magnanimity Disraeli had treated Gladstone. And the words have been quoted in which after his victory in 1874 he had protested against the disrespect with which some Liberals were inclined to treat their defeated leader. Gladstone had never forgiven that defeat, and his political antagonism had changed to a malignant personal animosity. In January, 1878, he had said at Oxford that his purpose had been 'to the best of my power, for the last eighteen months, day and night, week by week, month by month, to counterwork as well as I could what I believe to be the purpose of Lord Beaconsfield.'

That purpose, as he well knew, was as pure and patriotic as his own.

In his speech at the Riding School Disraeli said:

My lords and gentlemen, one of the results of my attending the Congress of Berlin has been to prove, what I always suspected to be an absolute fact, that neither the Crimean War, nor this horrible and devastating war which has just terminated, would have taken place if England had spoken with the necessary firmness. Russia has complaints to make against this country that neither in the case of the Crimean War nor on this occasion—and I don't shrink from my share of responsibility in this matter—was the voice of England so clear and decided as to exercise a due share in the guidance of European opinion.

For two years the fact that Gladstone, who had been Prime Minister, and might at any time be brought back to power, was in every speech encouraging Russia in her attack upon Turkey had prevented the voice of England from being clear and decided. And now, in the same speech in which he spoke of the 'insane covenant,' he charged Disraeli with 'an act of duplicity of which every Englishman should be ashamed.'

The provocation was great, but Disraeli's biographer can only lament that he 'was for one hour less noble than himself.'

Of the speeches delivered by Disraeli upon the subject of the Berlin Treaty, by far the most important was that in the House of Lords. It occupied two hours and a half in delivery, and cannot, of course, be quoted in full in this volume. But it is right that the account of the most important political action in his career should be told as far as possible in his own words, and room must be found for a few salient passages.

My lords, in these matters the Congress of Berlin have made great changes. They have restored to the Sultan two-thirds of the territory which was to have formed the great Bulgarian state. They have restored to him upwards of 30,000 geographical square miles, and 2,500,000 of population—that territory being the richest in the Balkans, where most of the land is rich, and the population one of the wealthiest, most ingenious, and most loyal of his subjects. The frontiers of his state have been pushed forward from the mere environs of Salonica and Adrianople to the lines of the Balkans and Trajan's pass; the new principality, which was to exercise such an influence, and produce a revolution in the disposition of the territory and policy of that part of the globe, is now merely a state in the valley of the Danube, and both in its extent and its population is reduced to one-third of what was contemplated by the Treaty of San Stefano.

* * * * *

My lords, I do not think that, so far as European Turkey is concerned, this country has any right to complain of the decisions of the congress, or, I would hope, of the labours of the Plenipotentiaries. You cannot look at the map of Turkey as it had been left by the Treaty of San Stefano, and as it has been rearranged by the Treaty of Berlin, without seeing that great results have accrued. If these results had been the consequence of a long war—if they had been the results of a struggle like that we underwent in the Crimea—I do not think they would have been even then unsubstantial or unsatisfactory. My lords, I hope that you and the country will not forget that these results have been obtained without shedding the blood of a single Englishman; and if there has been some expenditure, it has been an expenditure which, at least, has shown the resources and determination of this country. Had you entered into that war, for which you were prepared, and well prepared, probably in a month you would have exceeded the whole expenditure you have now incurred.

* * * * *

My lords, I have now laid before you the general outline of the policy we have pursued, both in the Congress of Berlin and at Constantinople. They are intimately connected with each other, and they must be considered together. I only hope that the House will not misunderstand—and I think the country will not misunderstand—our motives in occupying Cyprus, and in encouraging those intimate relations between ourselves and the Government and the population of Turkey. They are not movements of war; they are operations of peace and civilisation. We have no reason to fear war. Her Majesty has fleets and armies which are second to none. England must have seen with pride the Mediterranean covered with her ships; she must have seen with pride the discipline and devotion which have been shown to her and her Government by all her troops, drawn from every part of her Empire. I leave it to the illustrious Duke (the Duke of Cambridge), in whose presence I speak, to bear witness to the spirit of Imperial patriotism which has been exhibited by the troops from India, which he recently reviewed at Malta. But it is not on our

fleets and armies, however necessary they may be for the maintenance of our Imperial strength, that I alone or mainly depend in that enterprise on which this country is about to enter. It is on what I most highly value—the consciousness that in the Eastern nations there is confidence in this country, and that, while they know we can enforce our policy, at the same time they know that our Empire is an Empire of liberty, of truth, and of justice.

BOOK VI

EXIT

XXIX. FRESH TROUBLES
XXX. THE GENERAL ELECTION
XXXI. LEADERSHIP AND 'ENDYMION,'
XXXII. THE END OF A GREAT CAREER

CHAPTER XXIX

1878–79: FRESH TROUBLES

The prolonged labour at Berlin and the fatigues of the reception and the speeches at the House of Lords, and at Knightsbridge, and in the city, were too much for a frame weakened by age and by frequent illness. But Disraeli, notwithstanding Dr. Kidd's orders, could not get away to the quiet of Hughenden until a Cabinet had been held on August 10 to decide the question whether advantage should be taken of the present popularity of the Government, and a dissolution of Parliament advised. The discussion lasted long, and it was decided on sound and constitutional grounds that, having a large majority in the House of Commons, it would be unreasonable and unwise to impose on their supporters the expense and risk of an immediate election.

Then Disraeli went to Hughenden and remained there a couple of months. He suffered severely from bronchitis, and said his only hope was in 'a very quiet life, solitude, regular hours, and no talking.' He was quite alone; Montagu Corry was away in Scotland, and orders were given that none of his other secretaries, and no messenger, except on urgent and critical business, should be permitted to come near him.

He had somewhat recovered by the middle of September, when Salisbury came over from Dieppe to see him on the question of joining in an identic note to Turkey upon her delay in carrying out the Berlin Treaty, and Cranbrook engaged him in a correspondence upon serious difficulties which had arisen in India.

The first matter was soon disposed of by Disraeli's firm refusal to join in any such note when so short a time had elapsed since the ratification of the treaty.

The Indian question was more serious. The Ameer of Afghanistan, Shere Ali, had in July received with honour a Russian Mission under General Stoletoff, and there was reason to believe that some sort of treaty or convention had then been signed. Lytton, with the consent of the Cabinet, determined to send a Mission, and to insist upon its reception with similar honours. He was told that it should go to Candahar, and that it should not start until an answer had been received from Russia to a remonstrance which had been made by the British Government. He disobeyed these instructions. The Mission went at once to the Khyber Pass instead of to Candahar, and there, by the Ameer's orders, it was stopped at Ali Musjid, and refused permission to enter Afghanistan.

Disraeli was seriously disturbed by the prospect of an Indian war. On September 17 he wrote to Cranbrook: 'So long as the people thought there was "Peace with honour" the conduct of the Government was popular, but if they find there is no peace, they will soon be apt to conclude there is also no honour.'

And nine days later he wrote:

When V. Roys and Comms.-in-Chief disobey orders, they ought to be sure of success in their mutiny. Lytton, by disobeying orders, has only secured insult and failure.

What course we ought now to take is a grave affair. To force the Khyber and take Cabul is a perilous business. Candahar we might probably occupy with ease and retain. These are only jottings. I have the utmost confidence in your judgement and firmness, but I shall never feel certain now whether your instructions are fulfilled.

But his courage looked out from a letter to the Duke of Richmond of the same date. 'It is unfortunate, at such a moment, that the Sec. of S. for

For. Affairs should be at Dieppe and Sec. for India at Balmoral. We are terribly scattered naturally in Sept.; but events happen every day. They have no recess and no holidays. I think with firmness we shall settle all the other things and this too.'

His belief was justified, and for the time this trouble passed away. On October 25 the Cabinet decided on an ultimatum to the Ameer demanding a written apology for the affront at Ali Musjid, and an undertaking to receive a permanent British Mission in Afghanistan, and requiring a reply by November 20. No reply was received, and on the 21st the British forces entered Afghanistan at three points. The resistance of the Afghan troops was not very formidable. Parliament had been called together for December 5, and by that date the Ameer had made his submission.

With some hesitation the Liberal leaders decided to move votes of censure in both Houses. In the Lords the Government had the greatest majority on record, 201 to 65; in the Commons their majority was 101 (328 to 227).

For the next two months Disraeli was practically an invalid. One month was spent in solitude at Hughenden, but he was scarcely able to leave the house, even for a walk along the terrace, and when he came to London for the preliminary Cabinet Councils, he spent three weeks at Downing Street without ever going out of doors.

The only cloud on the political horizon was a conflict which had broken out in South Africa with the Zulu chief, Cetewayo. There, as in India, the instructions of the home Government had been disobeyed. Sir Bartle Frere, a distinguished Anglo-Indian administrator of large experience, and, it was believed, of sound judgement, had been sent out by Carnarvon to deal with difficult questions which had for some time disturbed the relations of the English, Dutch, and native inhabitants of the different districts.

He in December, 1878, had made demands on Cetewayo which he knew would not be complied with, and on the chief's refusal had made war upon him. Already, in apprehension of coming trouble, reinforcements had been sent to the Cape, and both Frere and Lord Chelmsford, who was in command of the British forces, were confident of speedy and complete success. Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, who had succeeded Carnarvon as Secretary of State for the Colonies, wrote to Disraeli on January 13, 1879: 'There is, I hope, a good prospect of the war being short and successful, like the Afghan campaign.' They had a cruel disappointment. Parliament was to meet on February 13, and on the 11th news came from the Cape that three weeks earlier, on January 22, a force of thirteen hundred men, of whom eight hundred were British troopers, forming part of the headquarters column under Lord Chelmsford's personal command, had been surprised and destroyed by the Zulus.

There was an immediate outcry for the recall of Sir Bartle Frere, but to this Disraeli would not consent. Resolutions demanding it were proposed in both Houses, but the Ministerial supporters were loyal to their chief, and the resolution was defeated in the Lords by a majority of 95, and in the Commons by the full party majority of 60.* Sir Garnet Wolseley was presently sent out with large, but not very well defined, powers, and a few days before his arrival at the Cape Chelmsford had gained a victory at Ulundi which practically ended the war.

During the whole of the session of 1879 Disraeli was in fair health, and regularly performed the duties of leadership in the Upper House, although he did not frequently intervene in debate. He looked upon the work of the session with satisfaction, and recorded its successes in a letter to Lytton:

* For Frere's explanation of the correspondence between him and Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, see Worsfold's *Sir Bartle Frere*.

[*Confidential.*] 10, Downing Street,
August 14, 1879.

I write to you now at the end of a long and laborious campaign, which has terminated triumphantly for H.M.'s Government. It is not merely that our external affairs figure well in the Queen's speech; that not a single Russian soldier remains in the Sultan's dominions; that, greatly owing to your energy and foresight, we have secured a scientific and adequate frontier for our Indian Empire; and that our S. African anxieties are virtually closed; but we have succeeded in 'passing' some domestic measures, in spite of factious obstruction, of first-class interest and importance—notably our Army Discipline Act, a measure of magnitude and gravity equal in range and difficulty to three great measures; and our Irish University Act, a question which had upset two administrations.

The day after this letter was written Disraeli went to Hughenden, and there, in better health than he had experienced for some time, he spent two months. But a terrible event in Afghanistan brought him early in September sad disturbance and anxiety. Under a treaty made in May with Yakoob Khan, who had been recognised as Ameer in succession to his father Shere Ali, a British Mission under Sir Louis Cavagnari had gone to Cabul, and had there been properly received. But six weeks after its arrival there was a violent outbreak in the city, and every member of the Mission was killed. The energy of the Viceroy and the brilliant soldiership of General Roberts soon established effective military control, and the ultimate consequences of the crime were not wholly injurious to British interests; but the incident caused much excitement in England, and was used against the Government with considerable effect in the profuse oratory of the autumn.

On November 9 Disraeli delivered what was to prove the last of his Guildhall speeches. He had always recognised the Lord Mayor's banquet as the

most fitting opportunity a Prime Minister could find for addressing his fellow-countrymen upon the larger issues of national, as distinct from party, policy, and now, in a passage which has become famous, and deserves its fame, he left a message which has lost nothing of its value:

In assuming that peace will be maintained, I assume also that no Great Power would shrink from its responsibilities. If there be a country, for example, one of the most extensive and wealthiest of empires in the world—if that country, from a perverse interpretation of its insular geographical position, turns an indifferent ear to the feelings and the fortunes of Continental Europe, such a course would, I believe, only end in its becoming an object of general plunder. So long as the power and advice of England are felt in the councils of Europe, peace, I believe, will be maintained, and maintained for a long period. Without their presence, war, as has happened before, and too frequently of late, seems to me to be inevitable. I speak on this subject with confidence in the citizens of London, because I know that they are men who are not ashamed of the Empire which their ancestors created; because I know that they are not ashamed of the noblest of human sentiments, now decried by philosophers—the sentiment of patriotism; because I know they will not be beguiled into believing that in maintaining their Empire they may forfeit their liberties. One of the greatest of Romans, when asked what were his politics, replied *Imperium et Libertas*. That would not make a bad programme for a British Ministry. It is one from which Her Majesty's advisers do not shrink.

It was a noble message, fitly delivered at 'the most crowded banquet that Gog and Magog ever looked down upon.'

CHAPTER XXX

1880: THE GENERAL ELECTION

A FEW days before the banquet at which the speech just quoted was delivered, a Cabinet Council had considered the question whether there should be an immediate General Election. Almost all the members of the Cabinet were against it. Disraeli's own view was that 'there was no single reason why a loyal Parliament should be submitted to such an injury and insult as a reward for their faithful service and support.' The Minister who hesitated was the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Sir Stafford Northcote saw that in consequence of the expenditure in the East and in Africa and India there would be a deficit of four or five millions, and he thought this ought to be met by an increase of taxation. At a time when the annual expenditure of the state was about eighty millions, this seemed a formidable amount, though it looks a trifle to those who are becoming used to a Budget of ten times that sum. And Sir Stafford was with some difficulty persuaded that by the issue of Exchequer Bonds additional taxation could be avoided. So Disraeli went off to Hughenden, and there spent six weeks of solitude and ill-health. During the whole time he was there he was scarcely able to leave the house, and when he came up to London in the middle of January he was obliged to call in Dr. Kidd. It was a great disappointment to him that he was unable to be present and bear the Sword of State at the opening of Parliament by the Queen in person on February 5. How valiantly he fought against his illness is shown by a letter written on that day:

I was obliged to give up any share in the ceremony, which, with the dinner of yesterday and the debate

of this evening, was beyond my physical powers. So the sword was carried by your friend the Duke of R. and G. . . . and I hope to be in my place in the House of Lords in two hours' time; but I have not yet put on a boot, and am as shaky as a man can be who has been shut up for two weeks.

The next day he added, 'I had great difficulty in speaking last night, and what I did say I said very badly.'

A short experience of the new session convinced the Government that an early dissolution was advisable. The organised obstruction in the House of Commons could not be effectually dealt with while uncertainty on this point weakened the authority of the leader of the House, and impaired the power of the Whips, and as Disraeli said in the manifesto which he issued when the dissolution actually took place, 'the doubt supposed to be inseparable from popular election arrests the influence of England in the councils of Europe.'

As to the probable result of a General Election both parties felt uncertain. The Conservative organisation, which Disraeli had so carefully fostered during the six years from 1868 to 1874, had been somewhat neglected in the days of prosperity, and from 1877 onwards it had been impossible for him, absorbed in foreign politics, to give personal attention to the details of candidates and constituents. On the other hand, the Liberals, irritated by their long exclusion from office, and excited by their new system of the caucus, were in vigorous activity. In the early part of the year there were two by-elections which seemed to promise a Conservative success. At Liverpool, in a constituency where there was a very large Irish vote, Home Rule was for the first time supported by the Liberal candidate, and he was defeated by a majority of 2,000. At Southwark, a great metropolitan borough of 220,000 inhabitants and 22,000 voters, the Conservative candidate, having a Liberal

and a Labour man standing against him, outnumbered them both, and for the first and only time in its electoral history the constituency returned a Conservative by a majority of the votes polled at the election.

On the day the result of the poll was declared at Southwark there was a Cabinet Council, and Disraeli wrote to the Queen:

February 14.

The Cabinet to-day considered the question of dissolution in all its forms and contingencies. They unanimously agreed that nothing but a very critical state of affairs, such as menaced during the first week of the session, could authorise such a step, as it would justly be reproached to them, that if dissolution were desired, it should have occurred in the late autumn. If, however, the factious spirit were continued, or revived, then they would recommend your Majesty to appeal to your people at all risks.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was in good heart, and said, tho' his plan was not yet strictly matured, it was his intention to make a financial proposition which would involve no additional taxation. This declaration on his part will be worth more than even the elections at Liverpool and the Borough.

The Queen wrote back that the victory at Southwark ' shows what the feeling of the country is.'

Again the decision as to the date of dissolution was postponed. On the following Thursday, February 19, Disraeli had a small luncheon party to which the two new members were invited. The Southwark member was asked for half an hour before the others, and had an interesting conversation with the chief. He told him that the result at Southwark should not be taken as a trustworthy indication of the general feeling of the country; that there were special personal and professional relations which had assisted him; that the Liberal caucus had chosen the wrong candidate; and that the antagonism between the Liberal and the Labour candidate had probably weakened them both. Disraeli listened thoughtfully, and asked many ques-

tions, and when the other guests arrived and the confidential conversation ended, he said: 'The coming election, whenever it comes, will be a very interesting one; Ireland, Scotland, and Wales will be against us; we must see if we can win enough in England to beat them all.'

This said, we went to lunch, and there Disraeli did not talk about politics at all. He seemed very well and in excellent spirits. The conversation between him and the new follower who sat next to him ranged over many topics. He said: 'You will find everything about the House of Commons very interesting.' Then he spoke of the three clerks—Sir Erskine May, Palgrave, and Milman—and the last name led to the mention of a brother who had just been appointed to a bishopric in India. Then the church of St. Antholin, of which the new Bishop had been vicar, was mentioned by the chief as one of much interest. The way in which he led or guided the conversation can be shown by a list of its topics: Milman the poet-priest, Croly 'the reverend Rowley-Powley,' St. Stephen's, Walbrook, *Salathiel*, the wandering Jew, Byron 'my moral me,' Beppo. A curious conversation of a Prime Minister with his newest recruit. Luncheon ended, Disraeli rose and said, 'My royal mistress commands me,' and so took leave.

At a Cabinet Council on Saturday, March 6, held at Arlington Street because of Lord Salisbury's illness, an immediate dissolution was decided upon, and the announcement was made in both Houses on the following Monday evening.

Disraeli issued his appeal to the electorate in the shape of a letter to the Duke of Marlborough, in which he declared that 'the strength of this nation depends on the unity of feeling which should pervade the United Kingdom and its dependencies,' and denounced the Home Rule agitation as 'a danger in its ultimate results scarcely less disastrous than pestilence or famine.'

Parliament was dissolved on March 24, and Disraeli went to Hatfield to await the result, and there received the news that on the first day of polling, Wednesday, March 31, his party on the balance of losses and gains had lost fifteen seats. By the end of the week fifty seats had gone, and when the counties came to vote, instead of diminishing the loss they doubled it. In the new Parliament the Liberals had a majority of 106 over the Conservatives, and there were, besides, 60 Home Rulers. The Queen was at Baden when the elections took place, and did not return until April 17. Meanwhile the Cabinet had decided to resign at once, and Disraeli spent a fortnight at Downing Street dealing with the most unpleasant of all the consequences of his defeat.

He wrote to Lady Bradford:

DOWNING STREET,
April 9, 1880.

I have nothing to say: a most dreary life and labour mine. Winding up a Government is as hard work as forming one, without any of its excitement. My room is filled with beggars, mournful or indignant, and my desk covered with letters like a snow-storm. It is the last and least glorious exercise of power, and will be followed, which is its only compensation, by either neglect or isolation.

One of his visitors at this disagreeable time was David Plunket, who was obliged to see him about some appointment which had to be completed before the Government went out. Plunket went to Downing Street and saw Montagu Corry. 'The chief is very sick,' he said. 'I do not think he can see you, but I will go and ask.' He came back. 'Yes; he says he would like to see you very much.'

Plunket found Disraeli lying on a sofa, in a brightly coloured dressing gown and a red fez, his sallow face looking like the face of a mummy. 'Ah, David,' he said (he had always before called him Mr. Plunket), 'what have you done in Ireland?' 'I fear we have

been able to do very little good, sir.' 'Very little! It is a wonder you could do anything at all in that dear, damnable, delightful country where everything is always the opposite of what it ought to be.'

On April 18, after a farewell Cabinet, Disraeli went to see the Queen at Windsor, and his resignation was accepted. His advice being asked as to whom the Queen should invite to form a Government, he naturally suggested Hartington. Gladstone, however, refused to take office under either Hartington or Granville, and on April 23, having been summoned to Windsor, he kissed hands on appointment as Prime Minister.

CHAPTER XXXI

1880: LEADERSHIP AND 'ENDYMION'

Two days after the acceptance of office by the new Prime Minister, the Queen summoned Disraeli to Windsor for a farewell audience. It was to her a sorrowful meeting. The friendly relations between her and Disraeli, which had begun in 1852 with the deference he had then shown to the wishes of herself and Prince Albert, and had been drawn closer by his high appreciation of the character and good judgement of the Prince, and his zealous support of his works of public usefulness, had now by the intimate association of six years ripened into a sincere and even affectionate friendship. When she heard at Baden what she called 'the sad and startling result of the elections,' she wrote to the defeated leader: 'The grief to her of having to part with the kindest and most devoted, as well as one of the wisest, Ministers the Queen has ever had is not to be told.'

The interview on April 27 was long and cordial. The Queen gave Disraeli a bronze statuette of herself as a parting gift, and charged him always to let her know his whereabouts, that she might write to him, not in the formal third person, for that had been discarded, but 'in the more easy form.' She relied upon his promise that, in or out of office, his service should be always at her command.

He told her his plans for the future. 'He would not,' he said, 'come to town or to the drawing-room, and wished to "keep out of sight," only coming up when it was necessary for him to be in the House of Lords.' 'His intention was to impress upon his party, of whom he would have a large meeting before the opening of Parliament, not to attack the Government

excepting when extreme measures were proposed, or any change in foreign policy. Otherwise they should let them alone.'

It was only a farewell audience in an official sense, for three times later in the year he was her guest at Windsor, and a fairly constant correspondence was kept up between them, the Queen writing with great freedom about her new Ministers and their Parliamentary difficulties. Towards the end of the year she became very anxious. She wrote on October 31: 'Oh! if only I had you, my kind friend and wise counsellor and strong arm, to help and lean on! I have *no one*.'

The party meeting of which Disraeli had spoken was held at Bridgewater House on May 19, the eve of the meeting of the new Parliament. Lord Rowton (for at Disraeli's earnest request a peerage had been conferred on Montagu Corry) reported to the Queen that it was 'a conspicuous success, in numbers full beyond expectation, in spirit excellent.'

It was indeed a memorable meeting. Peers and members of Parliament, and some who had been members and had been unfortunate at this election, gathered in the fine hall to the number of five hundred, and the chief, apparently in good health, addressed them for an hour and a half. He was in excellent voice, and had a small card in his hand at which he occasionally looked. It was the first time that any one had seen Disraeli use a note. The speech, which was never published, for no reporter was allowed to be present and all the hearers were charged to observe strict confidence, dealt with many topics. One or two phrases could not be forgotten. He spoke of the Duke of Wellington as 'a man far above the stature of our time,' and speaking of the bestowal of peerages on men who shrank from the performance of public service, he said such a man might have a title, but 'he would be no more distinguished than Mr. Chamberlain himself.'

In the closing passages of the speech he developed his favourite topic of the value of a landed aristocracy, and, in fact, repeated the phrases which he had used in the previous September at a dinner at Aylesbury of the Royal Bucks Agricultural Association. There he had spoken of ' our free and aristocratic government,' and had said, ' You may get rid of that government, gentlemen, but if you do you will either have a despotism that ends in democracy, or a democracy that ends in despotism.'

And his last sentences were an assurance that although, if he had been successful at the election, he might have sought repose and asked them to follow another leader, he would not desert them in the hour of defeat. There was a great outburst of enthusiasm, and when after some loyal speeches the great assembly broke up, it was with cheering that might have made a hearer think they were the triumphant shouts of a victorious party.

The promise made to the Queen and to the party was fulfilled. Disraeli presided that evening at the usual dinner on the eve of the session at which the Queen's speech was read; and during the session, although he spent as much time as he could at Hughenden, he came to town from time to time when his leadership was required in the House of Lords, returning to Buckinghamshire by an early train the next morning.

Nothing serious took place in the Lords in the early part of the session, but towards its close a Bill of much importance came to the Upper House. Distress and disorder were rapidly increasing in Ireland. The Peace Preservation Act, which was the only existing remedy against disorder, had been allowed to lapse: and by way of remedy for the agricultural distress the Government brought in a Bill called the Compensation for Disturbance Bill, which suspended for eighteen months the right of a landlord to evict a tenant for non-payment of rent. Lord Lansdowne

resigned the office which he held, and promptly became one of the Whig leaders in the House of Lords. It was only by the help of the Home Rulers that a majority of sixty-seven was obtained for the measure in the House of Commons. After two days' debate in the House of Lords on August 2 and 3, it was there rejected by the overwhelming majority of 281 to 51.

During the rest of the month Disraeli had much difficulty in dissuading the victorious Peers from following up this demonstration by throwing out a Hares and Rabbits Bill which was very popular with farmers. But he insisted on discipline, and, as he said, 'ordered a stout whip to be sent everywhere.' His old colleagues met him from time to time, and were all loyal, and Carnarvon, at his own request, was readmitted to their councils. At the end of August, very tired, and for some days almost prostrate with asthma, he went to Hughenden, and there spent two months in perfect solitude.

In his solitude, well or ill, he was not idle. When at the end of 1869 he had finished *Lothair*, he had found himself still with a period of leisure before him, able to do nothing effective in the House of Commons, but watching with interest the gradual dissolution of the Liberal majority into its discordant elements. In that time of leisure he had written the early chapters of another political novel, intended to deal with the fortunes of a young politician who should eventually reach the great place from which he himself had been so recently ejected.

In 1871, some of his supporters had conjectured that his lessened activity in political labours was due to the fact that he was writing another novel, and they were right in their surmise.

The renewed campaign of 1872 claimed all his thoughts; and eight years passed before another period of leisure allowed him to take up the unfinished manuscript. His saying that 'when he wanted to read a new novel he wrote one' has already been quoted,

and no doubt he would have enjoyed interweaving in a romance his recollections of the early years of his political life, and of the actors who then filled the stage. But he had now more urgent reason than the indulgence of his own pleasure for returning to literary pursuits. He was in need of money. The five thousand a year of the Prime Minister had ceased, and left only the pension, which was quite inadequate to his requirements; and he wanted means to enable him to acquire a seemly London house. Alfred de Rothschild had, with opportune kindness and great delicacy, invited him to occupy as if they were his own a delightful suite of rooms in his mansion in Seamore Place, but this obviously could only be a temporary arrangement, and to re-establish himself in a London home would necessarily be a somewhat costly proceeding.

The golden harvest which had been gathered from *Lothair* might perchance be repeated. So he set himself diligently and with entire secrecy to finish *Endymion*. To his most constant correspondents, Lady Bradford and Lady Chesterfield, he gave no hint of his occupation. He told Lady Bradford in May that he was absorbed in his own thoughts. In June he said that he was absorbed in studies and pursuits which made letter-writing almost impossible; and when in September the lady, probably somewhat curious as to the occupation of his solitude, asked him about reading and new books, and rather reproached him for not recommending some, his only answer was, 'I never read, and scarcely see a new book.' Even his old retainer, Baum, of whom he said, 'Baum for the first five years he was with me was a most excellent servant; for the next five years he was a faithful and interesting friend; and for the last five years he has been a most indulgent master,' was not allowed to know anything about it; and Montagu Corry was kept in complete ignorance until the book was finished, and it became necessary to negotiate with the publisher.

About *Endymion*, as indeed about almost every other book that Disraeli wrote, there has been a clash and conflict of opinion. That it served its first purpose, that of amusing its author when he wanted to read a new novel, there can be no doubt. But it reads as if it had been written simply with that object. It has no plot, and no other purpose than to amuse.

Whatever the author's original design may have been, if, indeed, at the outset he had formed any completed plan for the development of a plot, he can scarcely have intended the picturesque improbabilities of the second half of the book. A lodging-house keeper's daughter becomes the brilliant hostess of one great political party; the salaried companion of a banker's daughter marries the English Foreign Secretary, and after the death of her elderly husband becomes the Queen Consort of a foreign Sovereign; and the hero or leading character whose name gives the book its title is no hero, and has no character at all, but is a tepid personality who by a conspiracy of admiring women is pushed and propped up until he finds himself Prime Minister. It must have been with an ironic smile that the author of *Henrietta Temple* wrote the end of the thirtieth chapter of the third volume.

Endymion has made love in his feeble way to Lady Montfort during her husband's life. ('She had always a poodle, and always will have,' said Mr. Cassilis.) When the husband dies and leaves her all his enormous wealth the poor creature does not know what to do, so Lady Montfort settles his fate for him. She takes him to her new mansion in Carlton Gardens, and shows him a beautiful library looking out into the garden, and fitted up with exquisite taste, and says, 'If you will deign to accept it, this is the chamber I have prepared for you.' 'Dearest of women,' he says, and he takes her hand, and she kisses him on the forehead.

Of course, the book is well worth reading. The sketches of Lord Palmerston, and George Smythe,

and Sidney Herbert, and Lionel Rothschild, and Count Bismarck, and Louis Napoleon, are brilliant outlines, with judicious inaccuracies tending to obscure likenesses; there is one chapter, the sixteenth of the second volume, which describes Lord Montfort, which is an admirable specimen of Disraeli's clear and virile prose. There are, too, the wise sayings and witty phrases, and the graphic descriptions of social and political events which no book written by him could be without.

This book amused him when he wrote it, and amuses everyone who reads it, but that is all. All, that is to say, from the literary point of view.

But to Disraeli the business point of view was more important.

We do not know how much of the story remained to be written when he applied himself to the task of completion. But if, as appears likely, there was only one volume wanting, the labour of producing that in less than three months, when the work was again and again interrupted by his visits to London, was not inconsiderable. Every word was written by his own hand, and probably he found at seventy-five years of age that his pen was less fluent than it had been in earlier days. But before the end of July the book was complete, and Montagu Corry was commissioned to arrange for publication.

Longman, remembering the success of *Lothair*, made a handsome offer of £7,500 for the copyright before he had seen the manuscript, but Corry was not satisfied with that. He pressed for more, and was successful. On the night of August 4, when in a crowded House the debate in the Lords was drawing to a close, he sent to his chief a delighted note:

HOUSE OF LORDS,
August 4, 1880.

There are things too big to impart in whispers! so I leave your side just to write these words. Longman has to-day offered *Ten thousand Pounds* for *Endymion*.

I have accepted it. I cannot tell you what a pleasure it is to me to see my ardent ambition for you gratified; and you have an added honour which may for ever remain without precedent.

The added honour which excited Corry, and somewhat disturbed his usual correctness of expression, probably was the unprecedented amount to be given for the copyright of a book. Lord Derby told Northcote that there were three remarkable things about this matter: (1) He knew no other novel in English written by a man of seventy-five, or (2) published fifty years after a former novel by the same author, or (3) written by a man after he had been Prime Minister (except, of course, *Lothair*). The price now agreed was another remarkable thing.

On September 13 Longman went to Hughenden, and with an amusing air of secrecy, the old statesman lighting the candles of his room himself so that Baum should know nothing of the business in hand, the three volumes of manuscript were transferred from the three red boxes in which they had been kept to Longman's portmanteau, and a cheque for £2,500 was handed to the author and a receipt given.

The balance of £7,500 was by the agreement to be paid on April 1 in the following year. It was so paid. But in the interval there had been some doubt whether the book would have so great a success as to repay to the publishers the large sum they had risked. The story, honourable alike to author and to publisher, had better be completed now. The sale of the three-volume edition was not quite so large as had been expected, and early in March Disraeli heard that Longmans were likely to be losers. He at once offered to cancel the agreement and to accept a royalty on the copies sold. This would have meant, so the publishers thought, a present to them of no less than £3,000. They declined to accept the concession. Early in the year a cheap edition at six shillings was issued, and proved more popular than even *Lothair* had been,

and a few days after the balance of the purchase price of the copyright had been paid Corry was able to comfort his chief, then lying in his last illness, with the news that the publishers were no losers by their venture.

CHAPTER XXXII

1880-81: THE END OF A GREAT CAREER

At the end of August, 1880, the session ended, and Disraeli, exhausted by the labours and anxieties of that difficult month, went down to Hughenden, and almost immediately succumbed to the most serious attack of asthma which he had yet experienced. There was a short interval of fairly good health in the middle of September, during which the manuscript of *Endymion* was handed over and the work of correcting the proofs was completed, and then in early October the asthma returned, and was closely followed and superseded by a violent attack of gout which absolutely disabled him.

On November 9 he wrote: 'This is now the fifth week of my imprisonment, for though I am carried downstairs to sit in the sun, that is all I can manage, for I cannot use my legs. But the freedom from asthma is so vast a relief that I scarcely grudge the sort of coma into which my life has fallen. I have never had a fit of gout like it.'

A week later he was able to come to town for a day or two to consult Dr. Kidd, whose frequent visits to Hughenden were too expensive, and to arrange the purchase of a house in Curzon Street. The rest of the year was spent at Hughenden in absolute solitude, and it is probable that he then wrote the early chapters of another novel, which he did not live to complete. The fragment was not published until twenty-four years after his death, and forms an appendix to the fifth volume of the *Life*. If it had ever been completed, it would have been a much more important book than *Endymion*. The central figure, Joseph

Toplady Falconet, whose surname would, no doubt, according to Disraeli's invariable custom, have been the title of the novel, is an unmistakable likeness of Gladstone. He is represented as a youth of brilliant ability who leaves the University in 'a blaze of triumph,' and is 'the unrivalled orator of its mimic Parliament.' He becomes famous by a speech at a public meeting arranged for the purpose on the revival of the slave trade in the Red Sea, which electrifies his hearers. 'True it was that it subsequently appeared that there had been no revival of the slave trade in the Red Sea, but that the misapprehension had occurred from a mistake in the telegraph, manipulated by a functionary suffering from a *coup de soleil* or *delirium tremens*. But this did not signify, and made no difference whatever in the eloquence of Mr. Joseph Toplady Falconet, or the result which that eloquence was to accomplish.'

This young man, 'of an eager and earnest temperament,' desires 'to act as the lay champion of the Church,' and, 'firm in his faith in an age of dissolving creeds, he wished to believe that he was the man ordained to vindicate the sublime cause of religious truth.' The third chapter, which is obviously incomplete and unrevised, introduces Kusimara, a Buddhist from Ceylon, who has come to England to preach Buddhism as 'the great remedy which can alone cure the evils of the human race.' In him we were again to see Sidonia, but here a Buddhist instead of a Jew. The first and second chapters, with their descriptions of Clapham Common and its neighbourhood, and of the characters and domestic life of the Clapham sect, are fine examples of Disraeli's style. The copious vocabulary ('Bishop of a lusory mind') and the precision of phrase which are characteristic of it are notable in every part of this fragment, which is a curiosity of literature as interesting as any which his father had collected and catalogued eighty-eight years before.

Disraeli's correspondence during the latter part of this year showed him to be in a condition of unwonted despondency. He recognised that the time had come when a new leader must be found for the party, and was anxious that he should be found in the House of Lords. He hoped that Lord Salisbury would be his successor. In the combined advantages of rank and wealth and character and experienced capacity Salisbury had no rival. But the appointment of a new leader is never very easy, and much correspondence was needed to which Disraeli, frequently disabled by illness, was quite unequal.

To add to his troubles, Montagu Corry's sister was ill, and he had to take her to Algiers, and with the exception of a fortnight at the beginning of February, he was away from England from the end of October, 1880, to the second week of April, 1881. And, unfortunately, at the close of the year Salisbury was away at his villa at Beaulieu, in very poor health, and quite uncertain if he could be back in time for the opening of Parliament on January 7, 1881.

So Disraeli was obliged to take up again the duties of leadership, and, although for some days before that date he was so ill that he scarcely left his room, he managed to get to the House of Lords and make a long and not unimportant speech upon the condition of public affairs at home and abroad. At this time he was occupying the rooms at Seamore Place, but a week later he moved to Curzon Street, and whenever he was well enough to face an exceptionally severe winter he was regular in attendance at the House of Lords, though he seldom took part in debate.

His chief interest during the next few weeks was in directing the course of Sir Stafford Northcote, whose somewhat feeble authority over his followers in the House of Commons needed strengthening. The obstinate obstruction of the Irish members, which culminated in a sitting which lasted from four o'clock on Monday afternoon to nine o'clock on Wednesday

morning (January 31 to February 2), and only ended then by an arbitrary but well-justified exercise of power by the Speaker, made some alteration of the rules of procedure necessary, and Disraeli, always jealous for the independence of Parliament, was uneasy lest new rules should give too much power to the Ministry of the day. A meeting of members of the House of Commons was called at Curzon Street, and Disraeli, standing on a cushion in his gaudy drawing-room, addressed them with useful advice and exhortation that they should be loyal to their leader.

His last notable speech in Parliament was made on March 4, when Lytton, who had resigned the Vice-Royalty on the change of Government, and had been succeeded by Northbrook, proposed a resolution condemning the decision of the Ministry to withdraw from Candahar.

In the ordinary course of things Disraeli would have reserved his speech until a late hour, as the Government reply would close the debate. But he was suffering severely from neuralgic pains, and about ten o'clock he sent a message to the leader of the House that he intended to speak next. Granville sent back word that this would be inconvenient, as two other peers, with special claim to be heard, were ready and anxious to speak. The reply came too late, for after sending his message Disraeli had swallowed one drug and inhaled another in quantities so nicely adapted as to enable him to speak free from the depression of his complaint during the time that the speech required for delivery. He was not at his best, and to everyone's amazement he forgot at one point of the speech a perfectly familiar local name, but the old spirit flashed out when he declared, ' My lords, the key of India is not Herat or Candahar. The key of India is London. The majesty and sovereignty, the spirit and vigour of your Parliament, the inexhaustible resources, the ingenuity and determination of your people—these are the keys of India.' The motion

was carried by a majority of more than two to one (165 to 76).

One more interesting incident of this month has to be recorded. On March 10 he gave a dinner at Curzon Street.

Granville and Spencer and their wives, Lord Bradford and Lady Chesterfield, Sir Frederick Leighton, Alfred de Rothschild, Lady Dudley, and Lady Lonsdale were among the guests. The previous two days Disraeli had spent in bed through a sharp attack of gout. His own account of the dinner must be quoted. He wrote to Lady Bradford, who was not in town:

19, Curzon Street,
March 11, 1881.

The dinner yesterday went off, I believe, very well, but I was obliged to receive my guests with a stick, and while they enquired after my gout, required their sympathy for greater sufferings of which they knew nothing. As the gentlemen smoked after dinner, though not long, that gave me an opportunity of inhaling some of my poison in the form of a cigarette, and nobody found it out.

The Curzon Street house, with Baum and his wife for the other occupants, must have been very dull, and his books were at Hughenden, so it is not surprising that, well or ill, he often dined out at one or other of the grand or pleasant houses which were gladly opened to receive him.

In the third week of March he dined with the Prince of Wales, and a day or two later in the same week with Sir William Harcourt. Sometimes he had the old buoyancy of spirit and behaviour, sometimes he was very silent, and apparently suffering. He described himself as ' old and deaf.'

The asthma returned, and on March 23 he took to his bed. He felt at once that he would not survive this attack, and summoned Sir Philip Rose to receive his last instructions. ' I would rather live,' he said,

'but I am not afraid to die.' But his condition changed from day to day, and those about him were hopeful. Dr. Kidd at first attended him alone, but a few days later the Queen insisted upon other advice being taken, and certain difficulties of medical etiquette were by her influence set aside. Sir Richard Quain was called in, and Dr. Kidd very generously consented to act under his direction. It was of no avail. For nearly four weeks he lay in great weakness, with occasional spasms of violent pain, and gradually his strength was spent. He was patient and full of gratitude for the care and sympathy that came to him, and was much comforted by the constant presents of flowers and the occasional and always affectionate letters which came from the Sovereign he had so devotedly served.

In the early morning of April 19 he passed away. The three friends—Montagu Corry, Rose, and Barrington—were sitting by the bedside. He had long lain in motionless silence, apparently unconscious; the eyes were closed, and it was clear that life was ebbing away. Suddenly he moved. There was the familiar shrug of the shoulders as he tried to rise. Then he spoke. Montagu Corry, who sat closest to him and held his hand, said afterwards that words were spoken which he heard, but he could not guess their meaning. Perhaps the failing breath made them indistinct. Perhaps they were in a language he did not understand. No one can say. But there is little room for doubt. The Christian Jew in the last conscious moments of his life on earth was true to the sacred custom of his race, and in their language made the great avowal, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God, the Lord is one.'

* * * * *

As I write the closing sentences of this poor memorial of a great statesman there seems to come before my eyes the vision of a noble monument set up upon

the grassy slope of Hughenden. There lies upon his marble bier the form of Benjamin Disraeli, the sphinx-like face set in the majestic calm of death.

At the four corners of the bier there stand with eyes downcast four of his comrades, men whose names stand high in the regard of all their fellow-countrymen, who now seem guarding the repose of their chief—John Manners, Stafford Northcote, Gathorne Hardy, Robert Cecil. I seem to hear their sorrowful tones as they speak in turn their praises of the dead. John Manners stands, as in life he did, nearest to his heart. He says: 'I knew him well for forty-three years, and every year my love deepened with my knowledge. He called me his oldest and his dearest friend.' Then Stafford Northcote speaks: 'He was my friend and my zealous teacher in every branch of statesmanship; and the greatest honour of my life was that he chose me to be his successor in the leadership of the House of Commons.' Then comes the firm voice of Gathorne Hardy: 'For nearly thirty years I worked under him in unbroken friendship, and it was my pride that he called me his sword-arm of debate.' Then the deep, thoughtful tones of the Lord of Hatfield: 'In my early years I suspected and attacked him. But afterwards I came to know him well. On me, as I believe on all others who have worked with him, his patience, his gentleness, his unswerving and unselfish loyalty to his colleagues and fellow-labourers have made an impression which will never leave me so long as life lasts.'

Then I seemed to hear the sorrowing voice of a Queen in a distant palace: 'He was the kindest and most devoted, as well as one of the wisest, Ministers I ever had.' And as I turned away there came a whisper from a grave hard by: 'God bless you, my kindest, dearest. You were a perfect husband to me.'

The voices ceased. The vision faded away.

Surely there was true greatness in the man of whom these things were said.

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